

Hamas leader warns of more anti-Israel attacks in 1998

ABU DHABI (AFP) — The founder of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) called Monday for a halt of the negotiations with Israel and warned of more attacks against the Jewish state this year.

Sheikh Ahmad Yassin said the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip would only be a temporary solution.

"1997 was a bad year for the Palestinian people but it was also a year of defiance against the Israeli occupation and the American pressure," the sheikh told the United Arab Emirates weekly Al Sharq.

"The resistance will continue until we achieve victory...our hope is that 1998 will be a year of more sacrifices and more martyrs to force the usurping and occupying enemy to end its aggression against our people."

Sheikh Yassin, spiritual leader of the Hamas, renewed criticism of the landmark peace deal between Israel and Palestinians in Oslo 1993, saying it only "legalised Israel's presence on our land and recognised what it has usurped

Hamas activists complain of prison conditions

NABLUS (AP) — Imprisoned members of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) say their living conditions have become "unbearable" since the discovery of a Hamas bomb factory last week.

Forty-one prisoners held in Jneid Prison in Nablus sent a letter to President Yasser Arafat, president of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). A copy of the letter was distributed to the press Sunday.

Since the discovery of more than 700 kilograms of explosives at a bomb factory in Nablus last Monday, the letter said, 15 of the Hamas prisoners have been placed in solitary

confinement in small underground cells, while the rest have had most privileges revoked, such as outdoor exercise breaks, radios, and television sets. Pictures of family members were taken away, and security measures surrounding family visits were tightened, the prisoners said.

The prisoners said their leader, Jamal Mansour, had been transferred to Jericho prison for interrogation.

The 41 were detained five months ago, after Hamas claimed responsibility for two suicide bombings in Jerusalem that killed 26 Israelis. None of the prisoners have been charged.

of their territory."

"So, we do not see any use of participating in any negotiations with the Israeli enemy. We even advise our brothers in the Palestine Liberation Organisation to stop such negotiations, which are a mere waste of time."

Sheikh Yassin's comments came a day before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is due to meet U.S. President Bill Clinton in Washington for talks on the deadlocked Middle East peace

process. Mr. Clinton will also meet Palestinian President Yasser Arafat on Thursday.

The talks will focus on Israel's plans to redeploy its troops in the West Bank as part of the final phase of the autonomy accord. Israel has vowed to keep much of the West Bank, including occupied Arab east Jerusalem, drawing anger from the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in the self-rule areas.

"If we accept the West Bank and Gaza Strip, we accept them as a stage in the history of the Palestinian people and we will stop fighting as a ceasefire in a battle rather than a total peace," Sheikh Yassin said, in an apparent reference to the state of Israel.

"We will then leave the future for history and the generations to come. We are not planning to bereave the coming generations by compromising on our rights to the enemy...our rights will be recovered by our hands and theirs."



FUNERAL FOR THE CHILDREN: A funeral procession for some 70 children Iraq says died through a lack of medicine caused by United Nations sanctions tours central Baghdad surrounded by watching crowds Sunday. The coffins, wrapped in white linen and bearing pictures of the dead children with their names and ages, were carried on top of taxis (Reuters photo)

Syria attacks 'patient' attitude of U.S. in peace process

DAMASCUS (AFP) — Syria on Monday attacked the "patient" attitude of the United States towards Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as ineffectual for unblocking the deadlocked Middle East peace process.

"We have to question Wash-

ington's credibility in the peace process when [even] the American administration has pessimistic expectations of Israel, which is sabotaging peace," wrote Al Baath, the official daily of Syria's ruling Baath Party.

"This patient attitude is no

more than a useful policy in the face of an extremist government which is working daily to kill the peace process," it said.

The paper also said Mr. Netanyahu, en route to Washington to meet U.S. President Bill Clinton on Tuesday, "is

carrying political and military tension in his bags."

"Everyone predicts the failure of the negotiations at the White House unless the American president goes on the attack to forbid Netanyahu from pursuing his adventurist policy," the paper said.

Egyptian Islamists call for uprising in Turkey

CAIRO (AFP) — Egyptian Islamists called Monday for Muslims in Turkey to take up arms after Turkish courts ordered their Islamist Welfare Party dissolved.

"Every experience shows that holy war is the only way to wipe out apostasy," or the renunciation of faith, Jihad Tala'eh Al Fatah (Vanguards of Conquest) said in a statement.

"Many naive Muslims unfortunately believed that democracy could get them somewhere. Now the examples of Algeria, Egypt, Yemen and finally Turkey show that this is only an illusion," the

statement said. "Once again, the military has dissolved Welfare because it is against secular trends even though its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, agreed to place a flower on the tomb of the dictator Ataturk," it said.

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who founded modern Turkey, made the predominantly Muslim country a secular state.

Jihad Tala'eh Al Fatah called on "Muslims in Turkey to change their approach and draw conclusions from past errors."

"If death is our destiny, it is better to fall with our heads high than to die on our knees,"

said the group, a branch of the Jihad organisation that assassinated former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.

Jihad Tala'eh Al Fatah is the second largest Islamist group in Egypt after Gamaa Islamiya.

In Syria, the country's highest Muslim official, the mufti, Ahmed Kaftaro, said in a message to Mr. Erbakan that he regretted the dissolution order. "We regret the decision...and we were saddened by the state of democracy in Turkey," the sheikh said.

The Iraqi opposition party Ad Daawa said in a statement issued in Damascus that "the

provocative decision by the secular Turkish government has destroyed the hopes of the Turkish people for resuming their role among the Muslim nations."

"But dissolving Welfare and the ban on Erbakan from politics for five years will not halt the Islamist party's expansion," Ad Daawa added.

Welfare was dissolved Friday for attempting to overthrow Turkey's secular regime.

It was the largest party in the Turkish parliament, with 150 seats out of 550, and Mr. Erbakan was prime minister from June 1996 to June 1997.

Lebanese freed after 13 years in Israeli prison

TYRE (AFP) — A Lebanese man who had been detained in jail for 13 years in Israel was freed on Monday, Lebanese police said.

Abdul Karim Mohammad Abdul Latif Ali, 28, was handed over to the International Committee for the Red Cross at the Lebanese-Israeli border and taken to Lebanese army headquarters in the southern port city of Tyre, they said.

At the age of 15, Ali was sentenced by Israel to 15 years in jail for taking part in an anti-Israeli attack, but he was released two years early.

About 200 Lebanese are detained, mostly without trial

or charge and often for several years, in Khyam prison in the Israeli-occupied border zone in southern Lebanon and other prisons inside Israel.

Human rights groups have repeatedly denounced cases of torture and ill-treatment of Lebanese detainees in Israeli jails. Under the Geneva Convention, the arrest of Lebanese people in Lebanon and their subsequent detention in Israel is prohibited.

According to Israeli prison officials, there are at least 10 Lebanese held in jails inside Israel who have completed their sentences, but are still imprisoned.

Bail refused for Israeli accused of selling arms to Iran

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel's supreme court refused on Monday to order the release on bail of a businessman on trial for allegedly selling chemical weapons technology to Iran.

The court rejected an appeal from the businessman, Nahum Manhar, against his continued detention pending the outcome of his trial.

Manhar, 51, is accused of assisting an enemy at war with Israel and passing information to the enemy with the intention of harming state security.

Prosecutors allege that Mr. Manhar received \$16 million

from Iran for providing materials to produce mustard and nerve gas between 1990 and 1994.

Mr. Manhar, whose closed-door trial began on June 9, has denied the charges against him, claiming that Israeli authorities were fully aware of all his dealings with Iran.

Mr. Manhar also faces charges of obstruction of justice and violating a ban on publication of details of his case. He faces up to life in prison.

Mr. Manhar was arrested on Mar. 27 when he flew into Israel from Europe, where he has lived since 1985.

Rebel defections reported in Sudan's West Kordofan

KHARTOUM (AFP) — West Kordofan Governor Bashir Adam Rahma has announced that 1,578 rebel fighters, including 16 officers, have defected to Sudanese government ranks in his state.

The rebels came from the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the main anti-government force, which has

been fighting since 1983 to end domination of the mainly animist and Christian south by the Arabised, Islamist north.

In reports published here Monday, Mr. Rahma said the defectors had arrived at Abet town, which has now been cleared of rebel activities.

SPLA activities in the Kordofan region were said to be

confined mainly to the Nuba mountains and carried out principally by native Nuba tribesmen.

The governor said his state government was also negotiating peace with indigenous Tenah and Telche tribesmen who apparently supported the rebel movement.

Anti-government activities continued in the Nuba moun-

tains despite the fact that a group of Nuba rebels, led by Mohammad Haroun Kafe, had split from the SPLA and concluded a peace agreement with Khartoum last April.

Some Nuba tribesmen were also fighting alongside the SPLA in south Sudan. A Nubian, Yousef Kuwah, is a senior aide to SPLA Chief John Garang.

Two years on, Palestinian council marginalised by Arafat

RAMALLAH (AFP) — Despite a year which saw open clashes with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat over corruption, the Palestinian Legislative Council marks its second anniversary still largely marginalised in its fight for democracy in the self-rule authority.

"The problem is Arafat. He is not used to having another power which can question him or his decisions. He rules things like a tribe, not like a government," said council member Haneen Abdul Qader.

"The council has been unable to achieve half of what it should due to the obstacles which the authority puts in its way. We don't have rule by law, we have rule by personalities and by haphazard decisions," he told AFP.

When the 88-member council, based in the West Bank town of Ramallah, was created in historic elec-

tions on Jan. 20, 1996, hopes were high it would represent a democratic balance of powers in Mr. Arafat's Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

But in the two years since, Mr. Arafat has only signed one of the council's many bills into law — and that only last month after an uproar in the council — and many council members have complained that he is ignoring the body.

That seemed on the way to change in August when the council led its most overt clash ever with Mr. Arafat, issuing a damning report of widespread corruption in the badly-organised self-rule ministries and fingering three ministers as directly involved in corruption.

The council made an unprecedented demand that Mr. Arafat replace his entire cabinet and, in response, 16 of his 22 ministers submitted their res-

ignation. But more than five months later, the ministers remain in place and a much-promised reform to purge corruption has not occurred.

When the council threatened in December to hold a vote of no confidence in Mr. Arafat's government, he was forced to respond, but he kept the council at bay with backroom meetings and vague promises to conduct a cabinet reshuffle soon.

He also signed into law for the first time a bill passed by the council — a law on local councils — and promised other bills would follow.

But he has yet to approve a basic law passed by the council which would serve as a constitution for the PNA, out of fear of the limitations it would put on his powers, many council members say.

In October, one of the council's most renowned

members, Haidar Abdul Shafi, resigned in protest, accusing Mr. Arafat of ignoring the legislature.

"The council has been left absent from the political process, its opinions are not considered," Mr. Abdul Shafi, 78, said in announcing his resignation. Council member Ahmad Al Dik insisted the council had "proved its place as a legislative body and it plays a positive role."

"Certainly we cannot say it has succeeded totally. But the extent of understanding by the authority is much greater than before. This is a learning process. Each side has to learn to deal with the other," he said.

"There are also obstacles from the outside," he said, pointing to the 10-month deadlock in the peace process with Israel which overshadowed internal reform in the authority.

"The priority is the political front and the peace

process. If that improves, the internal front will also improve," he said.

But Mr. Abdul Qader admitted the council had "backed down" in the cabinet crisis but said a bloc of council members from Mr. Arafat's own Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organisation could spark another clash with the self-rule leader if he did not start reform.

"We have not used all our cards yet. If we are forced to, we will turn to the people, expose all the corruption and misadministration and have the people decide," he said. "Arafat has made a lot of promises and all we can do is wait. I personally don't believe they will happen," he said.

"The actual cabinet reshuffle is not the problem. Changing the people doesn't matter, we need to change the entire style of governing," he said.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

- 14:10 Sandokan
- 14:30 French Programmes
- 16:15 Prayers
- 16:30 Believe and Believe
- 17:00 Skippy
- 17:30 Square One TV
- 18:00 Gillette Sports
- 18:30 News Headlines
- 18:35 A Whole New Ballgame
- 19:00 News in French
- 19:15 Ramadan Talks
- 19:35 Black Hat Chef
- 20:00 What Would You Do?
- 20:30 Encounter
- 21:10 Hollywood Remembers
- 22:00 News in English
- 22:30 Marguerite Volant
- 23:15 Feature film: 'The First Season'
- 23:59 Islam in a Changing World

PRAYER TIMES

- 05:10 Fajr
- 06:31 (Sunrise) Duha
- 11:46 Dhuhur
- 14:38 'Asr
- 17:02 Maghreb
- 18:23 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Salfieh. Tel. 810740

Assemblies of God Church

Tel. 652785.

St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.

De la Salle Church Tel. 661757.

Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366

Anglican Church Tel. 652826.

Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331.

Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261.

St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.

Amman International Church Tel. 865897

Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328.

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 845457

The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932.

Church of Nazareth Tel. 675691.

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295

English-speaking Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Skies will be cloudy to partly

cloudy with a chance of scattered

showers and winds south-

westerly moderate. In Aqaba,

winds will be southerly moder-

ate and seas calm.

Amman 05/12

Aqaba 09/20

Deserts 03/13

Jordan Valley 10/19

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 13, Aqaba 22 Humid-

ity readings: Amman 60 per

cent, Aqaba 34 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Mukhlis Halaseh 5519220

Dr. Rami Sukkar 856457

Dr. Fadi Al Khathib 865456

Dr. Yousef Al Faqih 780104

Ferdows pharmacy 778336

Al Asema pharmacy 637055

Al Salam pharmacy 636730

Yacoub pharmacy 644945

Shmeisani pharmacy 637660

Nairoukh pharmacy 623672

IRBID:

Dr. Ahmad Qanu 281484

Al Quds pharmacy 623672

ZARQA:

Dr. Fahd Jabri 984549

Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

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Majali responds to deputies' debate of 1998 draft budget

Following are major excerpts of Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali's reply to speeches given by deputies during the debate in the Lower House of Parliament on the 1998 draft fiscal budget:



Abdul Salam Majali

"IN THEIR speeches, some of the deputies expressed pessimistic views about the situation in this country. Allow me to remind you of God's blessings represented in the country's tolerant leadership, the country's infrastructure, educational and health services, and growing agricultural production, in addition to our progress in housing, electricity, water, factories, and various other fields.

"It is true that the economic situation is not up to our aspirations at the moment and that there are problems represented in unemployment and poverty that continue to hinder us.

"But it is equally true that Jordan is witnessing continued construction and economic development. We refuse to say that we are in a recession or retreat, because the statistical figures available to us and those provided to us by Arab and international institutions reaffirm that our economic structure is sound and that our economic policies are going the right way.

"Unemployment in Jordan stands at 15 per cent, but this rate rises according to the season, towards the end of the school year. However, the government is keen on solving this problem through its economic, financial and monetary policies and not merely through measures taken by the Ministry of Labour or through the educational policy. We are keen on solving this problem through further investments and through encouraging the private sector to invest more.

"We are also focusing attention on encouraging Jordanian job seekers to accept any available jobs, even temporary ones, until better chances arise.

"While we are discussing unemployment, we must also face the present situation in the Jordanian labour market. We must admit that the local market provides 500,000 job opportunities to non-Jordanians and that many of these opportunities would provide a good income for those among unemployed Jordanians wishing to earn a decent living. We should stop complaining about unemployment and start urging our children to take the available jobs.

"A major portion of the government's current expenditure is dedicated to employees' salaries and pensions. Some of you have demanded an increase in salaries without coupling this with a reduction in the number of employees. The government was motivated by humanitarian considerations when it tried to retain the present number of employees until we find better chances for them in other positions.

"The direct taxes paid to the government, like income tax and sales tax, are those that come from the taxpayers. The indirect taxes are those that are paid by consumers and merchants. The taxes are paid according to income and those who earn more pay more taxes. We maintain social justice in taxes and we are in agreement that taxes should be paid in full. We remember also that the Income Tax Law was amended in 1996, when we offered low- and limited-income groups further exemptions.

"We share the deputies' views that we have to contin-

ue the financial reform programme and that we should develop new mechanisms to guarantee revenues and methods of expenditure so that they run in harmony with the democratic orientation. This gives the right to Jordanian citizens to demand that the government account for the manner in which revenues are spent.

"Some deputies raised the question of privatisation. The government realises the dangers of privatisation and is well aware of the risks but we wonder how these deputies came to the conclusion that privatisation is part of a conspiracy being hatched against Jordan to force it to sell out its wealth to foreigners. I would like to stress here that the government is going ahead with the privatisation process with sure and confident steps.

"You also realise that in 1986 Jordan embarked on the privatisation of the telecommunications corporation. In recent years, the government allowed the private sector to acquire shares in the corporation's activities, such as the pager, mobile telephone, and public phone services. Measures taken in this regard were based on transparent and competitive considerations and when the government offered to sell 40 per cent of its shares to a strategic partner, it did so because the tremendous technological developments in the telecommunications services would have required huge funds.

"With regard to railways, one deputy threatened that he would not approve its privatisation. Let the honourable gentleman tell us how can we meet the financial deficit facing this sector. By inviting others to participate in its construction and management, we are actually helping to transform this service into a profit-making company. At present, this sector is incurring a continued drain of resources and losses. We want to convert this sector into an institution that can earn profit by helping us export phosphate and fertilisers.

"With regard to foreign investors, we accept all those who come to us to invest within the framework of the law and without encroaching on our higher interests or laws. Registered companies are subject to Jordanian laws and there is no fear on the part of the investors. The doors are wide open for Arab investors, but regrettably, some deputies have accused us of discriminating between Arab and non-Arab investors in favour of the foreigners. This is totally untrue. Total Arab investments last year amounted to \$350 million.

"We approve of the proposal by the House's financial committee to hold consultations with the government in matters concerning privatisation and also in organising the process of selling the govern-

ment's shares in national companies. We also approve of the idea of accelerating enactment of the law on preventing monopolies.

"Some deputies brought up the question of Israeli investments in Jordan and the dangers involved in such an endeavour. We would like to reassure you about Jordan's security, independence, and safety. Deputies should rest assured that these issues are the main concerns of the government.

"Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel, and wants to open the door for comprehensive economic dealings with the Palestinians, who are still under occupation.

"At the Doha summit, Jordan and Israel signed an agreement under which Al Hassan Industrial Estate was considered as an industrial zone qualified to carry out joint manufacturing in conjunction with factories from Israel and the self-rule areas of Palestine. The products will be exported to the U.S. exempt from all customs duties.

"Some were claiming that Israel has 80 firms in this zone and that it would soon take over Jordan's economy. I say to these deputies to fear God and to admit that the facts are totally different. The Israelis fear opening their country to other markets and still feel they should remain cowed up in their tower.

"Some deputies have demanded that Jordanian-Arab relations be strengthened. We reject the insinuations that throw suspicion on Jordan's political stance.

"Our stand is crystal clear. We are for our nation in form and content and in word and deed. We maintain joint councils and joint committees and protocols with all Arab states. We support all common Arab meetings, and we continue to settle all our dues to pan-Arab organisations as is clear in the draft budget. We open our country to all faithful Arabs with no limits or restrictions.

"We maintain more trade with Arab nations than any other state in the Arab World and our volume of trade with Arab states is four times more than our trade with foreign countries. This also includes the areas of services, investments, and the exchange of manpower.

"Government subsidies in the 1998 budget total around JD115 million, or 5.8 per cent of the total budget. Subsidies cover food, universities, and others. But we should discontinue subsidies to those who do not need aid and we intend to do just that. As for the Ministry of Supply, it will continue to manage strategic foodstuffs, monitor prices, and combat irregularities in trade. The ministry will reduce its 'merchant' status role.

"The government plans to execute the national health insurance scheme but you have to be patient, because this is a complicated project. In education, I would like to remind you that the former Parliament endorsed a system of unifying extra customs taxes, which has adversely affected the performance of universities.

"Some deputies discussed the economic restructuring programme without due information and sufficient knowledge, although the finance committee discussed it in full with the government. This programme, agreed upon with the International Monetary Fund, will end this year but economic reforms will continue in a national five-year programme (1998-2002).

Prime minister lashes out during budget debate at deputy critical of government

AMMAN (J.T.) — Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali on Monday lashed out at Deputy Ahmad Oweidi Abbadi, who last week attacked the government and accused it of corruption.

"We reject any talk about bigotry and discrimination under the cover of integrity. Exposing corruption has its own means. Jordan is a state of law and it feels that the most serious threat to it comes from those who disrespect the country's norms and values under the pretext of defending them."

In a speech he made during last week's Lower House of Parliament debate of the budget, Dr. Abbadi attacked the policies of the present and past governments, accusing them of nepotism, favouritism and putting the wrong man in the wrong position.

He reserved his strongest remarks for Deputy Prime Minister Jawad Anani, Planning Minister Rima Khalaf and Minister of State for Information Affairs Samir Mutawi, all Jordanians of Palestinian origin.

He also accused other ministers and their aides, without naming them, of wasting millions of dinars because they are either "ignorant or enemies of the state."

"The government's policies are driving the country towards the abyss," he

charged.

Or. Abbadi, a former police officer, kept interrupting his speech by waving documents that he alleged contained proof of corruption and mismanagement.

"The government consists of ministers who have proven their capabilities and their allegiance in every place and position and I am proud of them and of their achievements," Dr. Majali countered during his reply yesterday to deputies' remarks on the budget.

"I do not accept any unjustified attacks on these ministers, who have won the King's and House's confidence. Should anyone believe that any minister is not trustworthy, he should present evidence to back his accusations and he should do that through normal and sound procedures," the prime minister said.

Or. Majali continued: "In defending all the former honourable officials who were attacked by the respected deputy, I attest to their integrity, since they have fulfilled their duties as best as they could and the present government is now building on their achievements. We deeply appreciate and respect them."

In a statement issued Wednesday, the government, without naming Dr. Abbadi, denounced the deputy's comments, which it said "deviated from the

subject in discussion [the budget], did not tell the truth and used personal and offensive language "when referring to public officials."

The statement also asked the House to take the necessary measures to preserve Jordan's democratic process.

On Saturday, Lower House Speaker Sa'd Hayel Srour said he was "surprised" by a recent government statement and stated that lawmakers have the right to express themselves freely under the dome of Parliament.

"The [House's] general discussion is an opportunity for all those wishing to speak to express themselves under Parliament's dome," said Mr. Srour. "I was surprised by the government's statement because the podium is accessible to both the government and House deputies," he said.

Dr. Abbadi, who cast a vote of confidence for the Cabinet of Dr. Majali on Dec. 15 and yesterday voted for the budget, had in his lengthy and often heated speech that was broadcast live on Jordan Television called on the government to stop granting citizenship to "the bedouins and citizens of neighbouring Arab countries" — an implicit reference to Palestinians, who form a large percentage of the King-

dom's 4.5 million people.

Or. Majali said he was dismayed that some deputies had criticised the government over the statement it made concerning Dr. Abbadi's speech and criticised Abbadi himself for producing government documents during his speech as proof of misuse of power.

"We have heard some deputies criticising our rejection of some deputies' speeches claiming that those speeches were in defence of integrity and meant to expose state corruption. Some deputies have indeed taken to the habit of producing official documents during House sessions, thus exercising intimidation against public servants," Dr. Majali said.

He also criticised the deputies who had protested last week that the government was not transmitting their speeches live on Jordan Television.

"Last Tuesday the House witnessed a controversy about the government's decision, which was taken in conjunction with the House speaker, to cut short the deputies' televised speeches and not to telecast them live. But some deputies took the liberty of employing terms with which we are not familiar. Speaking after the conclusion of the session, these deputies used terms to slander the executive authority

and the Cabinet members. They used a language which we consider alien to our ethics and our Arab and Islamic values and taste. But after the deputies apologised to the offended ministers, apology was accepted in good spirit and the sessions were telecast live in response to the deputies' desire," the prime minister said.

Dr. Majali also lashed at Dr. Abbadi for attacking the security forces, in particular the General Intelligence Department.

"When Jordanians go to sleep, they do so confident and reassured about their security and the safety of their lives and their property. They are confident that their country is well-protected from enemies within and without. These citizens are well aware that security does not come out of the blue. They realise that certain institutions are working day and night to protect this country and ensure its security. These institutions have been built with great and relentless effort and their personnel have been chosen carefully to shoulder their great and serious responsibilities. Therefore, any offence against these institutions or any attempt to damage their reputation is tantamount to tampering with the country's security and disregarding its future," Or. Majali stated.

Finance minister details achievements of 1990-1997 economic programme

Following are major excerpts of Minister of Finance Suleiman Hafez's address to the Lower House of Parliament:

"IN VIEW of the fact that the economic restructuring programme is due to end by February 1999, I would like to point out the main economic features of the period 1990-1997.

1. In terms of gross domestic products, Jordan realised a 6.4 per cent economic growth compared to 3.1 per cent from 1983-1988.

2. The national savings increased, thus reducing the margin of deficit in the fiscal budget from 21.6 per cent in 1988 to 3.6 per cent

in 1997.

3. We succeeded in building a production base capable of boosting services and exports. This led to a retreat in the deficit in the balance of payment from 14.2 per cent in 1988 to 1.7 per cent in 1997.

4. Jordan's foreign currency reserves in the same period increased to \$1.7 billion, up from less than \$100 million.

5. Jordan succeeded in maintaining stability in the exchange rate of the dinar against foreign currencies.

"I would like to point out the customs facilities.

1. We simplified measures for transit and customs offices.

2. We incorporated all

customs procedures into one system.

3. We cut down on routine concerning customs statements.

4. We inserted customs duties into the computerised system and the Internet.

"Concerning protection to local industries, the government decided to:

1. Exempt industrial equipment from customs duties starting March 1997. This exemption covered 492 items.

2. Reduce customs duties on 216 items used as primary materials.

"On monetary policy, I would like to point out that the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) is increasing its control over the performance of

banks and is currently drawing out a study on amending banking law and another law on the creation of an institution guaranteeing deposits.

"Jordan's foreign debts in 1991 amounted to JO\$208 billion. In 1997, these debts dropped to JO\$147 billion.

"In the field of education, the government has allocated JO\$253.3 million for the education sector and vocational training in 1998, compared to JD235.7 million in 1997. This increase of 12.7 per cent aims to increase the number of school classes to 32,998, the number of schools to 2,800 in 1998 from 2,747 in 1997, and support for vocational training by at least

JD4 million.

"In the health sector, the government allocated funds to complete the new hospitals under construction in Wadi Musa, Theilban and Sahab, expand Al Bushir and Al Nadim hospitals and Al Hussein Hospital in Salt, build residential quarters for nurses in Jerash and Ajloun, and convert the Maadi Health Centre into a hospital.

"On the judicial sector, the courts in Jordan now number 51 and allocations have been made to refurbish the Court of Justice in Amman and construct another one in Zarqa. Also, the salaries of court judges have been increased."

King: Peace deadlock might lead to explosion

(Continued from page 1)

He warned that "if there are no solutions to problems, despair might lead to explosion, might give the minority, that cannot see the opportunity (for peace, the tools) to distort so much of what has been done and to continue on a path leading towards disaster."

Replying to a question about Jordan's economy, the King said: "We have always been determined to make of this country a model and an example to others, and hopefully a positive one. Economically, I believe that we are all wise enough to realise that peace is the most important objective and the most important contribution that we can give to the generations to come. With it, the opportunities are tremendous for eco-

nomie development, for raising the standard of living, for an improvement in the quality of life. Obviously, this comes only when people have a sense of stability, a sense of confidence in themselves."

The King welcomed the delegation's visit to Jordan and expressed his delight at Jordan's participation in the Zurich International Equestrian festival next spring under the leadership of Princess Haya.

"I hope you feel at home amongst friends and I hope you will enjoy your stay. Some of the many sites that combine places of religious interest, history, culture, and all that makes a small country rather unique, particularly human spirit and determination to influence events in this region for a better future for all its peoples: security, peace,

progress, of people coming together of building something worthy of them in every respect: together with other areas of interest including our belief in the need to defend human rights and democracy and pluralism, the chance to contribute our talents and abilities towards a better future."

"Equestrian activities are very close to my heart, and that of Queen Noor, Princess Haya and many members of our family and the Jordanian family as well and I am determined in the coming period to do whatever we can to get more organised to give young Jordanians the opportunities to partake in this particular field."

The delegation is visiting Jordan at an invitation of Princess Haya in the course of preparations for the Zurich event in March.

Israeli generals urge Netanyahu to seize 'last chance' for peace

(Continued from page 1)

denouncing Jewish settlements in the occupied territories in 1978.

The 1978 letter led to the creation of the Israeli anti-settlement movement Peace Now.

Both leaders warned against the choice of a Greater Israel policy seeking the annexation of the occupied territories and warned that any policy aimed at "keeping control over the Palestinian people can only put the democratic

character of our country into question."

According to Peace Now, the total budget allocation for Jewish settlements in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Arab east Jerusalem is around \$350 million, an increase of \$20 million in last year.

According to an opinion poll published Monday a majority of Israelis think Mr. Netanyahu should seek a compromise with the Palestinians at his meeting with Mr. Clinton.

Asked: "Do you think that

the prime minister should try to find a compromise or harden his positions in his meeting with President Clinton?" 55 per cent of respondents said they favoured compromise. 25 per cent a hardening of positions, and 20 per cent did not express a view.

The poll was conducted for Israeli public television on a sample of 540 people representative of the Israeli population as a whole.

The pollsters gave a margin of error of four per cent.

Butler opens crisis talks in Iraq

(Continued from page 1)

Council's requirements" on full access for arms inspectors.

On the latest crisis sparked by Iraq's decision to bar an inspection team led by former U.S. Marine Scott Ritter last week, Mr. Butler voiced irritation with the debate on the nationalities in UNSCOM and the American's background.

"I regret this degree of personalisation," he said. "This is just too silly for words. This job is vastly larger than any individual."

Mr. Butler, who arrived earlier the same day on a 48-hour mission, said the question of whether Mr. Ritter returns to Iraq would depend on the job at hand and if he met the technical requirements.

"We choose the best that we can," he said of UNSCOM inspectors.

"Maybe in the future, we'll take a double take. We'll take a second look at their nationality" in recruiting inspectors, he said, referring to Iraqi grievances over alleged U.S. domination of the Special Commission.

Baghdad accuses Washington and London of exploiting UNSCOM to prolong the economic sanctions in force since Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. The commission, holding the key to

the lifting of sanctions, must first certify that it has eliminated Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Butler, who is due back in New York on Friday, said his talks with Mr. Aziz would focus on access to sites, inspections and technical evaluation meetings, the first of which — on warheads — would start in two weeks.

UNSCOM commissioners from China, Canada and Italy were part of his team for the talks with Mr. Aziz, in which Mr. Butler said he would also raise the suspicion that Iraqi authorities appeared to be "a step ahead" of UNSCOM teams going out for "surprise" on-site inspections.

Mr. Butler, who was staying at the Rashid Hotel used by foreign journalists and businessmen rather than with UNSCOM as on previous visits, was to hold two further rounds of talks with Mr. Aziz on Tuesday.

His arrival came shortly after thousands of Iraqis, including women and children, protested outside the UNSCOM offices calling for the lifting of sanctions. They branded Mr. Butler an "American agent" and burnt the U.S. flag.

WHAT'S GOING ON

FILMS

* "Neben der Zeit" at Goethe-Institut, Jabal Amman at 7:00 p.m.

* "Tanamera" (Part II) at the British Council, Jabal Amman at 6:00 p.m.

CONCERT

* "From Arabia to Andalusia" in concert, presented by Freddy For Music, at the Royal Cultural Centre on Thursday, Jan. 22, at 8:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* "Gertrude Bell Exhibition" at the British

Council, Jabal Amman, until Jan. 22.

* Display of Noor Al Hussein Foundation (NAF) products at the NAF Jordan Design and Trade Centre, off Wadi Saqra Street (Tel. 699141/2), until Jan. 31 (8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.).

* Installation by Jordanian artist Ali Jabn (until Jan. 27). Also displaying contemporary Arab artist exhibition (until Jan. 27) at Durat Al Funun, Jabal Al Weibdeh (Tel. 643251).

* Works by about a hundred artists from Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon and Jordan at Hammurabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street, until Feb. 20 (Tel. 5536098).

in Turkey

revocative decision by a secular Turkish government as demonstrated by the Turkish people in recent years.

"But discussing the decision by the Turkish government as demonstrated by the Turkish people in recent years is not the only thing that is happening in Turkey.

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Chinese military told to accept U.S. Asia role

BEIJING (AFP) — U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen told China's military Monday it could work with Washington or against it, but that either way the United States would prevail as an Asian power.

Mr. Cohen called this "a fundamental choice" for Beijing, in a speech to military officers here at the Academy of Military Science.

"We can work together toward our common interest, or we can work against each other," he said. "The United States will succeed on either path."

However, Mr. Cohen's meetings here with China's top military leaders appeared to have set the stage for expanding military ties.

He and Chinese Defence Minister Chi Haotian signed a Maritime Military Consultative Agreement that seeks to avert unintended conflicts at sea by opening regular channels of communication between the U.S. and Chinese militaries.

The agreement is the first of its kind between the U.S. and Chinese military.

Mr. Chi offered Mr. Cohen fresh assurances that China would not supply anti-ship cruise missiles to Iran.

And in a spirit of open-

ness, the Chinese military gave Mr. Cohen and a small delegation of Americans an unprecedented tour of the Beijing Air Defence Command Centre, which controls the surface-to-air missiles that defend Beijing from air attack.

Mr. Cohen made clear that Washington and its allies in the region want an open and cooperative relationship with the Peoples Liberation Army, as it transforms itself into a modern military power.

He called for more exchanges of military officers in areas such as strategic nuclear missiles, defence environmental matters, and affairs involving prisoners of war and service members missing in action.

But he also warned China against selling arms to Iran, and said it needed to do more to win the confidence of Washington.

"Today, China is an Asian power, and rightfully so," he said in the speech. "The United States does not fear this, nor do we view China as an adversary."

"Rather, the U.S. seeks to encourage China to step forward as a responsible and cooperative great nation — a nation that preserves its unique identity, but is more open on security matters and more respectful of the rule of

law." Responding to past Chinese criticism of the U.S. military presence in Asia, Mr. Cohen defended it as "an anchor of stability in the midst of the storm" and said no country had benefited more from the U.S. security umbrella than China.

U.S. alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand and the Philippines are "the first pillar of our security strategy in the region," he said.

"The U.S.-Japan security alliance, for example, will be as important to Asia's future as it has been to its past," he said.

Despite recent rancour over Taiwan and a history of mistrust over each other's intentions, Mr. Cohen and Mr. Chi toasted each other with champagne.

Mr. Chi said the military maritime agreement "marks a new and substantial progress between our two countries and our two militaries."

"It is also a specific expression of the positive efforts the Chinese and American sides have made for the maintenance of peace and stability," he said. Under the agreement, U.S. and Chinese delegations led by a general or admiral will meet once a year to discuss issues such as maritime safety mea-

sures, communications procedures for U.S. and Chinese warships, search and rescue operations, and common maritime "rules of the road."

The accord also foresees working groups and special meetings on naval issues.

With China developing a "blue water" navy capable of operating throughout the Pacific, U.S. military analysts anticipate a greater potential for incidents at sea in contacts with U.S. warships.

"As our naval and air forces have more contact, this agreement will increase understanding and reduce chances of miscalculation," Mr. Cohen said. "The agreement demonstrates the maturing relationship between our militaries."

In a spirit of openness, the Chinese military took Mr. Cohen and a small group of U.S. officials on a tour of Beijing's Air Defence Command Centre, which controls the belt of surface-to-air missiles that defend the Chinese capital against air attack.

The facility was so secret that the Chinese did not even acknowledge its existence until a week ago, a U.S. military official said. Reporters were barred from the tour, which was limited to the first 15 Americans ever to visit the complex.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin (left) smiles during a ceremony to receive the credentials of new ambassadors, as U.S. Ambassador James Collins looks on (Reuters photo)

Yeltsin returns to Kremlin, attacks persistent wage arrears

MOSCOW (AFP) — President Boris Yeltsin arrived back at the Kremlin Monday after a two-week holiday and clashed with his premier as he took the government to task for failing to clear massive public sector wage arrears.

Mr. Yeltsin, who resumed work briefly last month after a two-week illness, told Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin his social policy had "failed," saying state workers were still waiting for back pay.

But Mr. Chernomyrdin, who has emerged from months of political manoeuvring with his authority enhanced, defended the cabinet, saying the government had paid out the funds by the Jan. 1 deadline imposed by Mr. Yeltsin.

The clash came during a meeting with Mr. Chernomyrdin and his two first deputy prime ministers, Boris Nemtsov and Anatoly Chubais, the leading pro-market reformers in the cabinet charged with meeting the wages deadline.

"You have failed to meet our obligations," Mr. Yeltsin said. "Work has built up, and a whole number of problems have been created," he said in comments broadcast on

NTV television.

However, the premier shot back: "What do you mean Boris Nikolaevich? We paid out according to our obligations, and even 3,000 billion (old) rubles (\$500 million) extra for the payment of debts. We have paid off everything."

"This is not so, but you have indeed helped federation subjects more than it was expected," the president replied.

Mr. Yeltsin himself announced the debts had been cleared a day ahead of schedule on Dec. 30. But several television reports this month have said that state workers in the provinces are still waiting for up to six months of back pay.

Late salary payments have been one of the main social problems in Russia over the past two years.

Mr. Yeltsin appeared tired and spoke with a subdued voice during the televised exchange.

Although the president often criticises his ministers in public, it is unusual for Mr. Chernomyrdin to flatly contradict the president in public.

Mr. Yeltsin, who turns 67 on Feb. 1, returned to Moscow Saturday after nearly two weeks at Valdai, a residence 300 kilometres northwest of the capital.

The Russian leader has been in near isolation since Jan. 4, when he left on a holiday designed to ensure a complete recovery from a viral chest infection which kept him away from the Kremlin for two weeks last month.

Mr. Yeltsin was filmed last week skiing and riding on a snowmobile as part of a campaign by officials to present the president as fit and healthy after a month of intense speculation over his health.

Although officials said the Kremlin chief had suffered an acute viral chest infection, media reports said the president had suffered a potentially serious brain spasm.

Mr. Yeltsin returned to part-time work at the Kremlin on Dec. 22 after working out a compromise deal with his doctors, who wanted him to remain confined longer to ensure he made a full recovery.

Monday, Mr. Yeltsin was to meet Interior Minister Anatoly Kulikov, Defence Minister Igor Sergeev and Kremlin chief of staff Valentin Yumashev.

A group of ambassadors were also to present their credentials to the Russian leader Monday.

U.S. senator encouraged by 'change of attitude' in N. Korea

SEOUL (AFP) — U.S. Senator Carl Levin, the most senior American official to visit North Korea in the past months said Monday he was encouraged by a "change of attitude" there, but reaffirmed that U.S. troops would stay in the south until there is no longer a threat.

"It is a long and bumpy road, but there was some light of hope," Mr. Levin told reporters here after a two-day stay in Seoul briefing U.S. and South Korean officials on his three-day trip to the Communist North last week.

Mr. Levin is the highest ranking U.S. official to visit Pyongyang since its leader Kim Jong-il became general-secretary of the North Korean Workers' Party last year.

"The sky is still very, very dark," Mr. Levin said, but added he was "hopeful" of improved relations between the two Koreas, and also between Pyongyang and Washington.

However, as long as the threat of war exists on the Korean peninsula, the United States will "maintain military presence" in South Korea and be always ready to take "swift response," he said.

Mr. Levin said he delivered an offer from South Korea President-elect Kim Dae-jung for inter-Korean dialogue during a meeting with North Korean vice foreign minister Kim Gye-Gwan.

"The response was very cautious," said Mr. Levin, adding Pyongyang had a "wait-and-see" attitude towards any improvement in North-South ties.

President-elect Kim also told Levin Monday that South Korea would be patient and not force the issue of South-North Korea dialogue.

The U.S. official also said he noticed that "the tone was less strident than before" when he met Major General Li Chuan-bok, the Korean People's Army commander at the truce village of Panmunjom.

Gen. Li attributed the "continued belligerence" between the United States and North Korea to "our joint fault," and did not solely blame the Americans as Pyongyang had always previously insisted, Mr. Levin reported.

"At least he used the words (joint fault)," said Mr. Levin, a Michigan Democrat and the senior minority member on the Senate Armed Services Committee, although Gen. Li did not directly acknowledge North Korea's fault.

Another glimmer of hope was that "international organisations there said they had confidence that (international) food aid was given to those needed, and that it was transparent," Mr. Levin said.

Also unlike reports a few months ago that North Koreans were not free to ride bicycles, Mr. Levin said there was "freer movement of bicycles."

"Perhaps that is a little glimmer of hope, as well," Mr. Levin said.

In a meeting with South Korean Foreign Minister Yoo Chong-Ha Monday, Mr. Levin said Pyongyang had asked for Washington's quick response to the latest World Food Program (WFP) appeal for food aid.

"North Korea thanked the U.S. for their help until now, and also asked for a quick response to the latest WFP appeal," a foreign ministry official here said.

The WFP launched a call January for \$378 million in aid, compared with \$141 million sought from donors last year.

Mr. Levin said he went to North Korea to observe the canning of spent reactor fuel in line with the 1994 agreement under which Pyongyang froze its suspected nuclear weapons program.

"This is the first time that elected officials from the U.S. were allowed in to Yongbyon (North Korea's nuclear facility)," Mr. Levin said, adding he witnessed that the canning of the nuclear fuel rods was being implemented.

He said he had heard a New York Times report that North Korea was suspected of developing a new underground nuclear weapons complex, but said Washington "would look into it if such a site exists."

Incense and tears as Sumatran aircrash victims laid to rest

PALEMBANG, Indonesia (AFP) — There were tears and incense as more than 1,000 people gathered here Monday to pay their last respects to the 104 victims of a Singaporean airline crash exactly one month ago.

Family members, government and religious officials, airline employees and locals gathered for a mass burial near this town on Sumatra, where SilkAir flight M1185 crashed into a river on Dec. 19.

"We simply hope that through the ceremony today we gain some small consolation that loved ones are being put to rest with dignity and respect," said S. Dhanabalan, chairman of SilkAir parent company Singapore Airlines Ltd. "In different ways we must continue to bear the loss of loved ones. That they are lost is grievous enough," he said during the 75-minute ceremony.

Mr. Dhanabalan said SilkAir would do everything in its power to ensure the grave site and a monument to be built on it would remain "a fitting memorial" to all those who lost their lives.

Most of the victims were Singaporeans, while others included Indonesians, Malaysians, Americans, French, Germans, Britons, Japanese and one each from Australia, Austria, Bosnia, India and Taiwan.

The grave at Kebun Bunga (Flower Garden) public cemetery near Palembang, some 60 kilometres from the crash site, was donated by the South Sumatra provincial government.

Indonesian Transportation Minister Haryanto Dhanutirno, who also spoke to mourners, said the site, "15 minutes drive from the South Sumatra capital of Palembang, was chosen for its accessibility. His Singaporean counterpart, Mah Bow Tan, said in his tribute he was "especially disappointed" none of the 104 bodies had been found intact, but not for lack of effort.

The cause of Singapore's worst commercial aviation disaster is still under investigation in Washington, where the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board is examining the black boxes.

Mr. Mah said the next stage of the investigation would begin with reconstruction of what aircraft parts had been recovered as soon as they are transported to Jakarta.

He told a news conference at the airport here he hoped there would be an indication of the cause of the crash before the next anniversary.

Salvage workers spent more than two weeks dredging the murky Musi River, one of Indonesia's longest and widest, to recover the remains of the 97 passengers and seven crew members killed in the crash.

The aircraft's cockpit voice recorder and flight data recorder, known as the black boxes, were recovered but much of the Boeing

737-300 was torn to shreds.

"I was not too happy with the (search) exercise at the beginning, but they did all that they could," said 71-year-old Edward Scott, who flew here from Australia to say goodbye to his daughter Ruth, killed when the flight went down midway between Jakarta and Singapore. Representatives from nine faiths — Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Bahai, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Judaism and Sikhism — were each given three-to-five minutes to speak during the ceremony, reducing most of the crowd to silent sobbing.

Families could be seen clutching their loved ones as the speakers took their turn delivering tributes, mostly in English, with the Islamic and Buddhist sermons held in Indonesian.

The 40-by-70-metre grave site contained 93 coffins, 49 filled with the personal belongings of 42 Singaporeans and seven Indonesians.

"This is in accordance with Chinese beliefs that those departed should not leave without some of their belongings," said a SilkAir representative.

Two of the coffins were filled with human remains dredged from the muddy bottom of the river, while the remaining coffins were left empty. Only six victims were identified by their body parts and the remains of three have been sent for burial abroad — two to France and one to the United States.

Fictional fighting resumes on Thai-Cambodian border

BANGKOK (AFP) — Fresh fighting erupted Monday between forces loyal to ousted Cambodian Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh and strongman Hun Sen. Thai border troops said.

Sporadic shelling between the foes occurred in O'Smach, last stronghold of the prince's royalist forces, early in the day and continued into the afternoon, military officers said.

The skirmishes came after a one-day lull as both sides regrouped in the aftermath of intense battles which saw more than 300 shells land in Thailand over the past two days.

The hilltop bastion of O'Smach, besieged by powerful Second Premier Hun Sen's troops since August, straddles the Thai border and is clearly visible from Thai territory.

No injuries were reported in Monday's exchanges — which officers described as "regular" — but two stray shells fell on Thai territory causing no injuries, the military sources said.

Fighting had intensified Friday when Hun Sen's troops fired volleys of artillery and mortar shells onto dusty O'Smach during a two-day assault thought to be the latest attempt to overrun the border hamlet.

Four Thai soldiers and nine members of the royalist forces were injured during the two days of clashes which came as dissident politician Sam Rainsy tried to broker a ceasefire.

Officers said Monday that about 300 of Hun Sen's soldiers had moved up to the border with Thailand — against which the royalist forces are pinned — and were blocked by Thai troops.

Hun Sen, who ousted the prince in a weekend of bloody street fighting in July, has vowed to rout the royalists from their last base.

Hun Sen's remarks preceded Ms. Robinson's visit, due to begin Thursday, and follow Sunday's arrival of Thomas Hammarberg, the U.N.'s Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia.

Mr. Hammarberg, said Sunday that July's scheduled elections were at risk

China reshuffles top posts in three provinces

BEIJING (AFP) — China has reshuffled its top leadership in the provinces of Jiangxi, Hunan and Yunnan, the official Xinhua news agency reported Monday.

In eastern Jiangxi, Shu Huiguo, the deputy party secretary from 1995, was moved to the largely honorific post of head of the local people's congress.

In central Hunan, Wang Maolin, who had held the all powerful post of provincial party secretary since 1993, was also

moved to head the local people's congress.

The vice governor of southwestern Yunnan, Li Jiaying, was promoted to governor. Xinhua said.

Sunday, the all-powerful party secretaries of southern Guangxi and northern Inner Mongolia were both moved to the post of head of the local people's government.

The moves have come during each province's people's congress, which follow on from the National People's Congress in March.

Police defuse bomb in Basque area

SAN SEBASTIAN, Spain (AFP) — Police defused a bomb planted in a post office in the Basque province of Guipuzcoa after receiving a tip-off, authorities said Monday. No one was hurt in the operation.

A road service group had received an anonymous phone call Sunday night alerting them that a device had been planted in the post office in Hondarribia, near San Sebastian.

Police said they suspected that the Basque separatist group ETA was responsible.

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U.S. senate encouraged by 'change of attitude' in N. Korea

SEOUL (AFP) — U.S. Senator Carl Levin, the most vocal American official to visit North Korea in the past week, Monday, he was encouraged by a "change of attitude" in the North Korean leadership that would allow the U.S. to resume dialogue with the North.

Mr. Levin, who is a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he was "impressed" by the North Korean leadership's willingness to engage in dialogue with the U.S. and to accept the U.S. demand for the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

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E. Timorese holed up in French mission in Jakarta leave for Portugal

JAKARTA (AFP) — Five young East Timorese who had taken refuge in the French embassy here since Thursday, have left for the airport to fly to Portugal via The Hague, sources here said Monday.

Their departure followed the usual procedures and was arranged by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The five youths from the troubled Indonesian territory of East Timor jumped the gate of the French embassy Thursday and demanded to be allowed to leave for Portugal, sources said.

In recent years more than 130 other East Timorese have sought refuge in various embassies in the Indonesian capital before leaving for Portugal, via the Netherlands.

They are normally taken to Portugal after a few days following procedures under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Lisbon, the former colonial ruler of East Timor, considers the East Timorese as Portuguese citizens and grants them identity cards and passports.

The last batch of East Timorese to break into an embassy were six people including two children who entered the Austrian embassy in September.

The six asked to leave for Portugal but are still believed to be at the mission since Jakarta has refused to allow two of them to leave the country, saying they were involved in terrorism.

East Timor is a former Portuguese colony seized by Indonesia in 1975 amid international condemnation. The United Nations still recognises Portugal as the legitimate administrator of the territory, where Indonesian troops are accused of human rights abuses.

Nuclear waste set to leave for Japan

CHERBOURG, France (AFP) — A cargo of reprocessed Japanese nuclear waste will leave this north-western French port Wednesday, state-owned reprocessor, Compagnie Generale des Matieres Nucleaires (COGEMA), announced Monday.

COGEMA, which operates a reprocessing plant at La Hague near here, said the vitrified waste would be carried back to Japan in 60 containers aboard the ship Pacific Swan.

The containers were moved secretly from the reprocessing plant to COGEMA's port terminal at Cherbourg overnight Sunday under police surveillance.

COGEMA spokesman Hervé Haezard said the Pacific Swan would sail Wednesday but that its route would be revealed Thursday.

The environmental organisation Greenpeace and the U.S. Nuclear Control Institute (NCI) said in Washington last Tuesday that the Pacific Swan would pass through the Panama Canal.

The two organisations said that the route posed unacceptable risks for regional security and called on the United States to refuse transit for the ship through the canal.

A cargo of nuclear waste was transported around Cape Horn in 1995 and a second around the Cape of Good Hope in 1997.



Croatian Serb Slavko Dokmanovic (left) is flanked by a United Nations security man at the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague (Reuters photo)

Croatian Serb stands trial for Vukovar atrocity

THE HAGUE (AFP) — Croatian Serb Slavko Dokmanovic went on trial Monday before the U.N. war crimes court for his alleged role in the massacre of 261 civilians in the eastern Croatian city of Vukovar in 1991.

Dokmanovic, who was mayor of Vukovar until fighting erupted in 1991 between Croats and Serbs in Croatia, faces charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

His lawyers said he would plead not guilty to the U.N. International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. They say Dokmanovic was not even in Vukovar at the time of the massacre.

Monday's hearing began two hours late, to give the court time to view video tapes behind closed doors, a source close to the defence said.

It was not known what was on the tapes, but it was possible they might have been recordings of testimony made in Belgrade early this month by four witnesses whose identities have been kept secret, the source said.

Alternatively, they might have been television tapes of the fall of Vukovar, he added.

In November 1991 when the then Yugoslav army captured Vukovar after a three-month siege, about 300 people took refuge at the city hospital. They included civilians

and wounded soldiers. The Yugoslav troops evacuated these people to Ovcara, a hamlet about 10 kilometres away, where the majority were killed.

In 1996, court investigators discovered a mass grave at Ovcara from which 200 bodies have been exhumed so far.

Dokmanovic, 48, was not on the official list of persons charged by the U.N. court but his name was on another list which was kept secret.

He was arrested on June 27 last year near Vukovar after an operation by the U.N. Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia.

Three Yugoslav army officers believed to have ordered the Vukovar massacre, namely Mile Mrksic, Miroslav Radcic and Veselin Slijepcanin, are still at large.

Yugoslavia has refused to hand them over to the U.N. tribunal, arguing that its constitution forbids the extradition of Yugoslav nationals.

The trial of Dokmanovic could prove an embarrassment for Belgrade since the capture of Vukovar was carried out by the Yugoslav army, which at the time took its orders exclusively from the Serbian leadership, notably Slobodan Milosevic, then president of Serbia and now president of federal Yugoslavia.

Labour launches campaign to win back blue-collar support after 1996 rout

HOBART. Australia (AFP) — Australia's Labour leaders launched their campaign here Monday to win an election expected this year, but warned they must regain grass roots support to have any chance.

Boosted by a new poll showing Labour held its lead over the government into the New Year, party chiefs said they had a chance of regaining government just two years after the worst defeat in recent history.

But opposition leader Kim Beazley told the first of the party's first national conference in opposition for 15 years: "We must push on and work even harder than we have these last two years to earn government."

"And once we have earned it, we must work even harder to be worthy of retaining it," Mr. Beazley told 190 conference delegates.

The four-day conference will commit a future Labour government to achieving economic growth of at least four per cent, faster employment growth and taxation reform that will crack down on tax shelters for high income earners.

The conference Monday agreed to rebuild a stronger and more independent public service after Prime Minister John Howard's government

axed 30,000 public sector jobs in the 22 months since it won power.

Deputy leader Gareth Evans underlined the pitch to win back the blue collar vote lost by Labour at the 1996 election when he admitted that a key factor in the defeat was the perception that the rich had made substantial gains during 13 years of Labour government.

"Upper income groups, by and large, did well during those years," he told the conference's opening session.

Mr. Evans said the rich enjoyed substantial incomes and access to advances in technology as part of the globalisation of the economy.

But for lower-income groups, it had been a different story, with wages growing more slowly and little access to new technologies.

A speech by Labour Party President Barry Jones highlighted the race theme, which could be a dominant election issue following the conservative government's battle with the indigenous minority last year.

Mr. Jones accused Mr. Howard of being divisive in his persistent refusal to apologise to Aborigines for past wrongs against them.

Mr. Howard angered Aborigines with a plan, amended by the Upper

House Senate, to dilute native landrights and by refusing to apologise on behalf of the nation to "the stolen generations" of children separated from their parents by official policy.

"The prime minister confuses guilt with shame," said former science minister Jones. "Innocence is the opposite of guilt, shame is the opposite of pride."

Australians had felt a great sense of pride for the actions of their troops at Gallipoli in World War I, although most were not there.

"But we also feel shame about cruelty and neglect in past generations. Not a shame that paralyses action, but a shame that pushes us on to create a juster society."

Mr. Jones said, however, that Labour had mistakenly believed there was widespread community consensus on issues of race, sexuality, gender and tolerance.

"We failed to provide after-sales service, to reassure voters who felt threatened by the speed of social and economic change," he said.

He defended the policies of the last Labour government but added: "We needed to listen far more, and to explain, explain, explain, taking advantage of every opportunity to clarify and reassure."

Titanic wins best movie in Golden Globe awards

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — The epic "Titanic" won the best drama motion picture late Sunday in the Golden Globe awards, handed out by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.

Titanic director James Cameron was awarded the top prize in the best motion picture director.

The Golden Globe awards are widely seen as an indicator of what will happen in the upcoming Oscar award ceremony, to be held here on March 23.

With its \$200-million budget, the three-hour disaster epic has set an all-time cost record.

"Titanic" stars Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio as two young people who meet and fall in love on the supposedly unsinkable ship, which hit an iceberg and sank on its maiden voyage across the Atlantic in 1912 with the loss of 1,500 lives.

Nominees in the best motion picture category included "Amistad", "The Boxer", "Good Will Hunting" and "L.A. Confidential".

"As Good as It Gets", won in the best musical or comedy category. Its stars, Jack Nicholson and Helen Hunt, won in the best comedy actor and best comedy actress categories.

The best dramatic actor award went to former Easy Rider star Peter Fonda, for his role as a

beekeeper in "Ulee's Gold".

British actress Judi Dench won the best dramatic actress award for her portrayal of Britain's Queen Victoria in "Her Majesty" Mrs. Brown.

In the supporting roles, Burt Reynolds won an award for his part as a porn movie producer in "Boogie Nights", and Kim Basinger for her

part as a femme fatale in "L.A. Confidential".

The best foreign film award was given to the Belgian movie "Ma Vie en Rose" (My Life in Pink).

Newcomers Mat Damon and Ben Affleck won the best screenplay award for the movie "Good Will Hunting".

The Hollywood Foreign Press Association also hands out awards for television shows.

The "X-Files" won the best television series award.

Ally McBeal won in the best musical or comedy category. The show's star, Calista Flockhart, won in the best actress in a musical or comedy category.

Michael J. Fox won the best actor in a musical or comedy category for his role in "Spin City".

The best television dramatic actor awards were given to Anthony Edwards of "ER", and Christine Lahti of Chicago Hope.

One surprise award was given to Shirley MacLaine, who won the Cecil B. DeMille Award for "outstanding contribution to the entertainment field."

The Golden Globes awards have become increasingly popular over the last three years when NBC television began to broadcast the events. This year the station devoted three hours to the event.



Kim Basinger holds her Golden Globe Award she won for Best Supporting Actress in a Motion Picture for her role in the film "L.A. Confidential" at the 55th annual Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills (Reuters photo)

Branson still eager for balloon bid despite team-mate's accident

LONDON (AFP) — British millionaire Richard Branson still wants to make his third bid to become the first person to fly non-stop round the world in a balloon, despite a serious accident Sunday involving one of his team-mates, he said.

Alex Ritchie, 52, the engineer in the three-man balloon team, suffered serious injuries during a parachute jump in Morocco. For unexplained reasons, his parachute did not open until he had almost reached the ground and even then it did not unfold completely.

"Although he is seriously injured, he is believed to be stable and his injuries are not thought to be life-threatening," said Mr. Branson, who has sent an ambulance aircraft to Morocco to bring his friend back to Britain.

Mr. Ritchie made a free-flight training jump from 4,200 metres along with the third member of the team, Per Lindstrand. But his parachute failed to open when it should have done.

The Virgin empire boss said Saturday that he hoped to leave on his third round-the-world balloon adventure next week.

end. He said a decision would be taken Monday on finding a replacement for Mr. Ritchie.

He said that if weather permitted, he hoped to take off in his Virgin Global Challenger craft from a spot near Marrakech in Morocco where the team has set up its headquarters.

In an abortive first attempt in January 1997, Mr. Branson was forced to make an emergency landing in the Algerian desert because of technical problems.

Mr. Ritchie was part of the team on that occasion and took great personal risks to slow the descent of the balloon when it seemed likely to crash. He climbed onto the roof of the cabin and managed to jettison two drums, each containing one tonne of fuel.

The accident to Mr. Ritchie is the latest of a series of setbacks which Mr. Branson has encountered since he set his heart on making the epic balloon flight.

After failing last January, he failed again in December when his balloon took off while it was being filled with helium in Morocco. It was recovered but was badly damaged.

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House clears budget after marathon debate

(Continued from page 1)

launched last year to cushion the negative impact of economic reforms on Jordan's poor. He said the government has allocated JD6 million to support the programme that will be carried out over several years. More funding of the programme is expected to come through grants and loans from other countries and institutions.

"The government is seeking foreign financing for the social security package, because donors are willing to finance such humanitarian projects and not others that are important to us and not to them," Dr. Majali said.

He said the government

was committed to privatisation as part of efforts to liberalise the economy and join world markets.

He also sought to calm agitated deputies who expressed fear that Israeli investors would buy major shares in several state-run companies due to be privatised under the scheme.

He dismissed allegations that there were 80 Jordanian-Israeli ventures. "Fear God. The truth is totally different. It is the Israelis who fear openness. They are the ones who closed on themselves, who live with the mentality of siege."

The government in September allowed for 100 per cent foreign ownership in banking, telecommunications, transport and insurance sectors. Until then, foreign ownership was limited to 49 per cent. However, three sectors are excluded: construction and contracting, general retail trade and mining.

The mining sector includes the strategic potash and phosphates industries, along with cement that already have substantial Arab holdings.

Now that the House granted the government its vote of confidence and endorsed its budget, many politicians expect Dr. Majali to reshuffle his cabinet formed in March while Parliament was in recess to supervise the Nov. 4 elections.

Several politicians said they expected the prime

minister to include up to 12 new ministers, some of them lawmakers, in the much-expected reshuffle.

Six deputies in the 80-seat House did not show up for Monday's vote. Those who voted against the bill include Khalil Haddadin, Nasha'at Hamameh, Basam Haddadin, Mohammad Azayeh, Abdullah Akaileh, Mohammad Bataineh, Mohammad Oran, Mohammad Bani Hani, Osama Malkawi, Nazih Ammarin, Walid Awajun, Ziad Shwikh, Khalik Atieh, Mohammad Abu-Hdeih and Ayed Adaleh.

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Team of senior officials formed to investigate Rabia slayings

(Continued from page 1)

inside the villa and stabbed her too," Ms. Lidaki said in her statements to the police.

She said that the killings began with "a big fight between five Iraqis and the Iraqi businessman, Namir Ochi, who was in the home of his employer, Sami George."

"They exchanged accusations and the Iraqis said he owed them large sums of money. Ochi refused their demands so they stabbed him and attacked all those present," she told the investigators.

The witness said that the killers believed "everyone present was dead, including me. They left the house, and just then the Iraqi diplomat arrived. They stabbed him and left only to

return again some moments later with his wife, who they also stabbed."

An Amman-based Iraqi opposition group denied news reports that one of the Iraqis killed in the attack was a member of an opposition group.

"Mr. Sami has no relationship with the Iraqi opposition," said Mo'ad Abdul Rahim, a spokesman of the Iraqi National Accord.

"He is a well-known Iraqi rich man who has investments in Europe, Jordan and Arab countries but he had no affiliation with any Iraqi opposition group," Mr. Mo'ad told the Jordan Times.

"The attack is nothing but the settling of accounts between Iraqi merchants and wealthy persons," Mr.

Mo'ad said.

A government official said that the sending home of the bodies of the Iraqis scheduled to take place today has been put off until Wednesday.

He added that the convoy carrying the dead bodies will take off from the residence of the Iraqi ambassador in the heart of Amman.

Four Iraqi diplomats who tried to leave Jordan back to Iraq were turned back only hours after the fatal stabbing in Amman, Reuters quoted security officials as saying.

"Four were turned back from the Karameh border after arriving at 06:00 GMT on Sunday," the security official who was not named was quoted as saying.

Jordanian officials at the

Karameh border gateway with Iraq were ordered to detain all Iraqis trying to leave Jordan for questioning and to have them photographed, the officials added. Similar steps were taken to prevent Iraqis from leaving the country from Queen Alia International Airport.

The Associated Press quoted Western diplomats as saying that Ochi ran a company for President Saddam Hussein that handled food imports into Iraq. Ochi apparently was also reported by the agency to be involved in illegal arms imports and owed the Iraqi leadership millions of dollars.

Clinton mulling own plan for Israeli troop withdrawal — press

(Continued from page 1)

detailed plan to break the Middle East peace deadlock centred on a phased Israeli withdrawal from more than 12 per cent of the West Bank.

The newspaper said Mr. Clinton could present the plan to Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Arafat when he meets the two separately in Washington on Tuesday and Thursday.

The U.S. package would replace an Israeli proposal which offers one additional troop pullback from the West Bank on condition that the Palestinians first meet a long list of demands focusing primarily on their commitment under previous agreements to crack down on militants.

Mr. Netanyahu has said the troop withdrawal would only take place after a delay of several months during which the Palestinians would have to meet Israel's security and other demands.

His cabinet on Sunday

decided not to present Mr. Clinton with any details on how much land it would be willing to turn over to the Palestinians.

Under the Israeli plan, following the one-time troop withdrawal, Israelis and Palestinians would enter directly into negotiations on a final peace agreement setting the borders and status of the Palestinian Authority (PNA).

Israel would carry out a third similar withdrawal after another delay of several weeks, bringing 39 per cent of the West Bank under full or partial Palestinian control.

Finally, Israel would agree to carry out another troop pullback of undetermined scope by mid-year and without linkage to the outcome of final status negotiations, the Haaretz said.

Mr. Netanyahu, who left for Washington early Monday, has refused to carry out more than one additional West Bank pullback and

has indicated that if Washington and the Palestinians insist on more, Israel will simply divide the amount of land it is willing to cede and spread the withdrawal out over stages.

Mr. Netanyahu reiterated Sunday that in any case Israel will not cede any land at this time which "cuts into" areas deemed to be "national security interests."

His cabinet last week adopted a broad list of these interests, said to comprise some 60 per cent of the West Bank.

Mr. Arafat discussed the deadlocked Palestinian-Israeli peace talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo on Monday ahead of his visit to Washington, officials said.

The Palestinian chief is expected to leave Cairo on Tuesday for Paris for talks with French President Jacques Chirac, Palestinian officials said. He arrived earlier Monday in Egypt.

the Palestinians civilian authority over four per cent of the West Bank which is now under full Israeli control.

Several weeks later and once the Palestinians had met some of the Israeli conditions, Israel would shift a further four per cent of the West Bank from their full control to the exclusive rule of Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

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Majali welcomes Iraq's pardon of Jordanian prisoners, says Kingdom is yet to be officially informed

(Continued from page 1)

Razaq handed Jordanian officials a list of the names of all Jordanian prisoners in Iraq.

During the meeting "I conveyed to his Majesty, the government and the Jordanian people to release them and he promised to convey this message to the Iraqi leadership," added the premier.

"The Iraqi statement, however, did not reflect the real efforts and contacts in this issue, especially that Jordan had stood and still stands beside the Iraqi people in their plight and has extended all possible support to lift the sanctions," Dr. Majali said.

The premier said that the Kingdom spared no effort to free all Jordanian

prisoners in Baghdad especially following the executions of four Jordanians in Iraq on Dec. 8.

Mr. Shheilat told a press conference in Baghdad on Monday that he expects between 70 to 80 Jordanian prisoners to accompany him back home on Wednesday.

Mr. Shheilat thanked the Iraqi president for the clemency and dismissed suggestions that President Saddam's decision to free Jordanian prisoners was meant as a snub to the Jordanian leadership.

"Nobody said the King was unable to release the prisoners," Mr. Shheilat said at the press conference.

"I don't think that it is a strike against anybody. I am sure the [Jordanian] government is happy with what is happening," Agence France Presse

(AFP) quoted Mr. Shheilat as saying.

The Iraqi clemency, which followed the stalling to death of six Iraqis in Amman, including Deputy Chief of Mission Hikmat Hajo and his 37-year-old Egyptian wife, was received by scepticism by diplomats in Amman, AFP said.

"Saddam's gesture is a negative message to the Jordanian regime," said one diplomat, who was not named by the agency.

"It seeks to strengthen the Jordanian opposition and recapture the hearts of the Jordanian public who denounced Iraq's executions of four Jordanians in December," added the diplomat.

He was referring to Baghdad's execution of four Jordanians on charges of smuggling car parts out of Iraq, which drew wide criticism from

the Jordanian government which recalled its charge d'affaires in Baghdad and expelled seven Iraqi diplomats from the Kingdom.

"Saddam Hussein, who knows his popularity in Jordan was severely affected by the executions, can hope for a strong return to Jordanian public opinion with his sudden and unexpected gesture of clemency," added the diplomat.

Another diplomat added that President Saddam's move "gives credibility to the opposition in Jordan who were able to achieve in a single meeting with the Iraqi president what the government has failed to achieve in several months of negotiations."

Minorities in Britain vent fury at what's in a name

As societies such as Britain's become more multicultural, problems can arise when the activities of one community — innocently or otherwise — trample on the feelings of another. Such a culture clash has happened in a southern English town, where religion and gambling have collided.

By Murali Krishnan

LUTON, England — The wrath of Islam has descended on a British hingo hall which changed its name to Mecca.

Windows of the building were smashed in December, and in January, a petrol bomb was thrown at its neon sign.

Police believe the acts of vandalism may be linked to the outrage felt within the 15,000-strong Muslim community in Luton, a town north of London, at the local bingo hall's use of the name of their holy city in Saudi Arabia.

"Linking the heart of Islam with gambling and alcohol is blasphemous," said Akhar Dad Khan, the secretary of Luton Islamic Society.

He denied any knowledge of the vandals. "It could have been anyone," he said. But he added: "Our religious sensibilities have been hurt, and there is bound to be anger."

The local Muslim community, largely comprised of people of Pakistani and Kashmiri descent, have demanded that the hingo hall changes its name to something else.

This poses a problem for the owners, the Rank Group, which owns a nationwide chain of Mecca Bingo Clubs. Rank changed the name of its Luton premises from Top Rank to Mecca in December to help consolidate the company image.

If it agrees to drop the name in Luton, it may come under pressure to do likewise with its 134 other bingo halls.

It is not the first time that the feathers of Britain's ethnic minorities have been ruffled in this fashion. Last year, Hindus rallied

against Clarks, a big footwear company, for naming two brands of winter shoes "Vishnu" and "Krishna."

These are the names of Hindu gods, and the choice of name sparked loud protests and picketing of Clarks' shops in the English Midlands.

"To link Hindu gods with shoes is disgusting and unthinkable," said a priest at the big Hindu temple in Neasden, north-west London. "We would not have rested until the brand names were banished."

Keith Vaz, a Labour MP of south

"There was no market research done before we gave the names to the footwear. It was an employee's idea, and we went ahead with it, not knowing that it would offend religious feelings."

Mecca Bingo's public relations manager, Debbie Cull, said: "While we have the greatest respect for the views of local residents, the name 'Mecca' was first used in commercial terms in this country more than 100 years ago."

"We also appreciate the concerns about the name's association with hingo, but this has a long-established tradition in the United Kingdom and is a well-recognised brand. The first Mecca Bingo Club was opened in 1961."

However, Akbar Khan has pointed out in talks with the company that there were few Muslims in Britain in the past. The numbers have grown rapidly in recent decades as people have emigrated to the country from former colonies, and the Islamic community has become well-established.

The Islamic Human Rights Commission has protested at the general treatment of Muslims in Britain. "Islamophobia at all levels of British society is now a recognised phenomenon and Muslims are routinely abused," said an official.

At Mecca Bingo, the management has promised measures aimed at assuaging hurt feelings in Luton. However, Muslim leaders have insisted on a name change.

Gentini News

The writer is an Indian freelance journalist who specialises in politics and the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Kashmir. He is currently based in Britain.

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Plummeting crude prices prompt OPEC to advance watchdog meeting

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Plummeting crude prices on world markets have prompted the watchdog body of the oil group OPEC to bring forward to next Monday a meeting that was not originally due until March.

The move came as oil ministers from the big Gulf producers held consultations over an Omani request Sunday for an emergency meeting to consider how to react to the falling oil price.

Next week's meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the 11-nation Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) could quickly lead to a full ministerial conference, Gulf oil sources said.

"We have to wait for a few days to see if other oil minis-

ters of the organisation will announce their participation in the committee's meeting," one source said.

"Who knows, there could be a surprise in the last minute," he added.

Analysts said the decision to bring forward the meeting reflected OPEC's concern about the situation and the need to take immediate measures.

The committee, grouping OPEC's Secretary General Rihwanu Lukman with the oil ministers of Iran, Kuwait and Nigeria, has no powers to decide on production levels but can recommend measures, including extraordinary OPEC talks.

"The committee holds urgent talks when the market

situation is serious. I think it is going to identify the main reasons for the oil price deterioration and make proposals to OPEC, which will then decide on measures," a source said.

The committee's decision coincided with a call by Oman's oil minister Sunday for an emergency meeting of Gulf oil ministers to discuss the price crisis.

Officials said the ministers of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which controls nearly 45 per cent of the world's crude wealth, have started consultations.

"There are no concrete plans to hold that meeting but the ministers are holding consultations to see whether there is a need for the meeting proposed by the Omani minister," said a Gulf oil official, who requested anonymity.

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf oil heavyweights have refused to comment on mounting speculation about a full OPEC emergency meeting but last week the United Arab Emirates (UAE) ruled out such plans in a commentary carried by its official news agency WAM.

Oil experts said Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude pro-

ducer and exporter, and two other GCC OPEC members, Kuwait and the UAE, are opposed to any decision to abandon the recent OPEC output agreement.

"Abandoning that agreement would mean the three countries would have to cut more than one million barrels per day of their production at a time when they are fighting to safeguard their eroding market share and tap their large production capacity surplus," one analyst said.

"If the GCC oil ministers meet, they will stress this point ... I think they are going to send a message to OPEC that the new ceiling must not be touched and output could be trimmed if some members respect their quotas," he added.

Venezuela, Nigeria and Qatar have been blamed for most of the surplus production within OPEC, which already produced close to the new increased output ceiling of 27.5 million barrels per day (bpd) when it was approved by OPEC's ministers in Jakarta in November.

Analysts said calls for a return to the previous ceiling of 25.03 million bpd would mean a big concession from the big

Gulf producers to the quota-busters.

"The Gulf meeting, if it takes place, will not be the magic wand that will end the price crisis," a Gulf oil executive said.

"But at least it shows they want to act to prevent a fresh price collapse that could severely hurt Gulf producers given their heavy reliance on oil exports," he added.

"The ministers will likely call for discipline in the market and cooperation between all producers but will not sacrifice their market share," the oil executive said.

Oil prices have lost more than \$3 over the past few weeks to reach their lowest level in nearly four years.

The plunge was attributed to OPEC's output accord for the first half of 1998 and quota violations, the Asian economic crisis which trimmed demand, healthy crude stockpiles in the West, a mild winter in the northern hemisphere and the return of sanctions-hit Iraq to the market.

A \$3 drop in prices meant the GCC, which also groups Qatar and non-OPEC Oman and Bahrain, lost at least \$40 million a day.

Israel to raise \$3 billion in foreign currency in 1998

AMMAN (J.T.) — Israel is planning to raise \$3 billion in foreign currency during 1998, according to the Israeli finance ministry's accountant general. During the coming year, Israel plans to offer, for the first time, long-term (30-year) bonds on the U.S. capital markets without outside guarantors.

A break down of the \$3 billion: Israel Bonds will raise \$800 million, U.S. loan guarantees \$1.44 billion, Yankee Bonds \$200 million, banking syndicates \$150 million and other sources \$50 million. The remaining \$350 million will be raised by adding to any of the above sources, excluding the Israel Bonds, the accountant general said.

During 1997, Israel fulfilled its aim of penetrating into new markets with successful offerings of Eurobonds, Samurai Bonds (Japan) and Yankee Bonds (United States).

Meanwhile, Israel's inflation rate in 1997 was seven per cent during 1997, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. During December, the CPI fell by 0.3 per cent, as did the index in November. During the last month of 1997, although the food index (excluding fruits and vegetables) rose by 0.1 per cent, the fruit and vegetables index fell by 2.5 per cent, the apartment index by 0.4 per cent, the furniture index by 0.2 per cent, the clothing and footwear index by 2.6 per cent, and the transportation and communications index by 0.1 per cent. However, the health index rose by 0.4 per cent, and the apartment maintenance index by 0.2 per cent.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) The next month should be easier. You'll be meeting with associates and planning group activities. Unfortunately, it feels like you're pushed to try something you don't want to do. Don't get into anything until you're ready. A good opportunity could open up later tonight. When the time is right, act.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You're going to have to work hard this morning, but by this afternoon you should have help. Unfortunately, an older person wants you to do something you are just not interested in. Hopefully, the person who's coming to your aid this afternoon will prove to be a valuable ally. You can use all the help you can get.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) The next four weeks will be better for travel and higher education. Later in the day, you'll notice your workload increasing. It wouldn't be so bad, except you'd rather be running and playing with your sweetheart. Promise yourself a nice reward tonight, by way of motivation.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You have a couple new things to deal with and that may have you slightly rattled. If you are not familiar with computer programs, this may be the time to go on line. The sun's transit through Aquarius focuses attention on technical matters. Why not get a friend to help? That will make the initial learning phase a lot more fun.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) You're in a better position to start new projects, but it's not quite time yet. Instead of launching boldly into something new, stop and think about it a while longer. Consider all the possibilities. Listen to the advice of your roommate and best friends. You might as well do this purposefully, because it's going to happen anyway.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) The pace quickens. The focus is on learning, in more ways than one. One of your problems is a short attention span. You tend to move from one thing to another rapidly. You keep notes so that everything is in order. That's your assignment today. Even if you can't do it happily, you should make every attempt to do it.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) The morning is your best time for love, decision-making and action. You'd better hurry, though. Your window of opportunity won't be open for long. You tend to put off making decisions. That's not a good idea. Make them this morning, so you won't have to worry about them later.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) The emphasis is on your home or domestic matters. That will be the case for the next 30 days, so you might as well get used to it. You're finally able to see exactly what you want. Your roommates may not go along with it quite yet, but at least you're clear about it.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) The best time for you is this morning. There will be plenty of other people around to help you. Later in the day, you may feel like you're under a little more pressure. You might feel guilty about whatever you haven't done. Do what you're supposed to do before anyone gets a chance to complain.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Your focus is going to be on money for a while. You'll be doing all kinds of things that will bring more money in, and that's kind of neat. Some of these things will be difficult, but that doesn't phase you for a minute. Difficult is your middle name.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You'll feel much more relaxed this morning, and that's wonderful. Don't get too complacent, though. Be prepared for something on older person might ask of you later on today. It won't hurt to have though it out a little bit ahead of time.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) This morning is not a good time to make decisions. It'll be hard for you to think your way out of a paper bag. For one thing, you won't be able to remember how you got into that paper bag in the first place. At any rate, you'll get much better at everything this afternoon. Don't worry.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

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- 3) Computer background will be a plus,
- 4) Willing to travel abroad,
- 5) No experience required.

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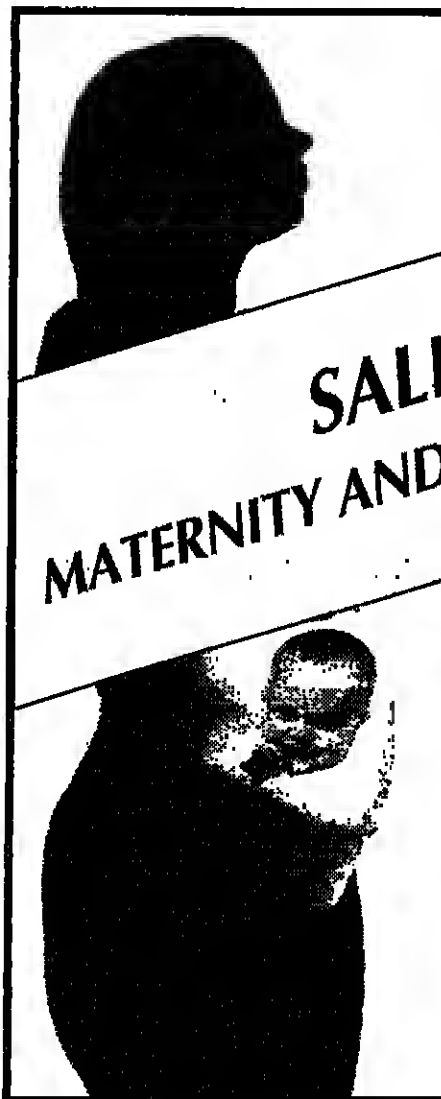
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THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- 1 Boat's spine
- 5 Manufacturer
- 14 Uneven cut
- 15 Verner's captain
- 16 Tolerate
- 17 Vocal inflection
- 18 Stoltz of "Mask"
- 19 "The Prisoner of"
- 20 Russian river
- 21 Sweets
- 22 Corn servings
- 23 Casablanca's country: abbr.
- 24 down (cabbies up)
- 25 L.A. to N.Y. direction
- 33 Weekday abbr.
- 34 Scandinavian poet
- 36 Well worker
- 37 Ship in the stars
- 39 Three-foot lengths
- 41 Pleasant city in France?
- 42 Artist
- 44 Fragrant bed
- 46 Soggy ground
- 47 Skitterlike
- 48 Dorian and Pausanias
- 51 Very dry, as wine
- 52 Graceful bird
- 53 Sweets
- 61 Jai
- 62 "Taxi"
- 63 Gardener and others
- 64 Mark — Baker
- 65 Rectify
- 66 English elevator
- 67 Concludes
- 68 Time charges
- 69 Dates repeatedly

DOWN

- 1 Had the answer
- 2 Younger
- 3 Eastern leader
- 4 Personal storage closet
- 5 "An Unmarried Woman" director
- 8 Encourages in wrongdoing
- 7 "The ... and I"
- 9 Icelandic sage
- 9 Gives new guns
- 10 Steam star of the 50s
- 11 South
- 12 American cape
- 12 Art sch. subj.
- 13 Solidifies
- 21 Clumsy clogs
- 22 Lorne in eight films
- 25 Impertinent
- 28 Kitchen gadget
- 27 — Saxon
- 28 "Crazy Legs" Hirsch
- 29 Tacks on
- 30 Mystery Excuse
- 31 Army looksee briefly
- 32 Bottom of the barrel
- 35 Seniors' grp.
- 38 Foul-weather wear
- 40 Alga
- 43 "Carry on ..."
- 45 Chair piece
- 48 Eyelids
- 50 Records
- 52 Pige
- 53 Corduroy ribs
- 54 Ken or Lena
- 55 Ayn, the writer
- 56 Musante's TV series
- 57 Tallow base
- 58 Actress Arden, casually
- 59 Vault
- 60 Mech+ jets

CROP SHRED DEEP
LINE HOUSE OLGA
ADLAIE STEVENSON
DEY NETH ORRIST
OPTS BUGS
AMPULS CARE POD
MIATA ERIE CUBA
BARRYMOULDWATER
LOSE AARFS AROSE
EWIE DIET CLONES
FONT MALL
CHORUS TORO OWN
HUBERTHUMPHREY
AGED AMUSE ICES
ROYLS YODEL TAKE

Peanuts

HAVE I EVER TOLD THE WORLD WAR I FLYING ACE HOW MUCH I ADMIRE HIS BEAUTIFUL SILK SCARF?

PERHAPS THE FLYING ACE MIGHT BE WILLING TO TRADE IT FOR A LITTLE KISS...



Andy Capp


LOVELY TO RUN INTO YOU AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, FLO.

LIKEWISE, NANCY.

HOW'S THINGS BETWEEN YOU AND ANDY?

SAME AS EVER, DEAR.

IT'S JUST GETTING A LITTLE HARDER TO REMEMBER THAT HE WAS THE MAN WHO MADE ME FORGET TYRONE POWER.



Mutt'n Jeff

I'M MAKING A LETTER I WANT DELIVERED TO MY GIRL IN AN HOUR!

IN AN HOUR?

BOY IS HE AN OPTIMIST!

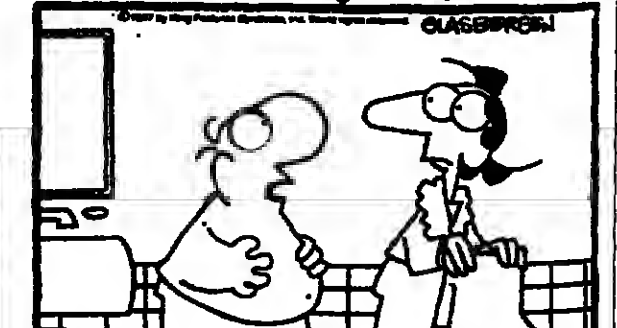
WHAT KIND OF A STAMP DO YOU PUT ON THAT?

POST OFFICE



THE BETTER HALF, By Glasbergen

While my father was telling me to make something of myself, my mother was giving me food. That explains a lot.



JUMBLE. THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

NOMUD

GORAC

CLEFEE

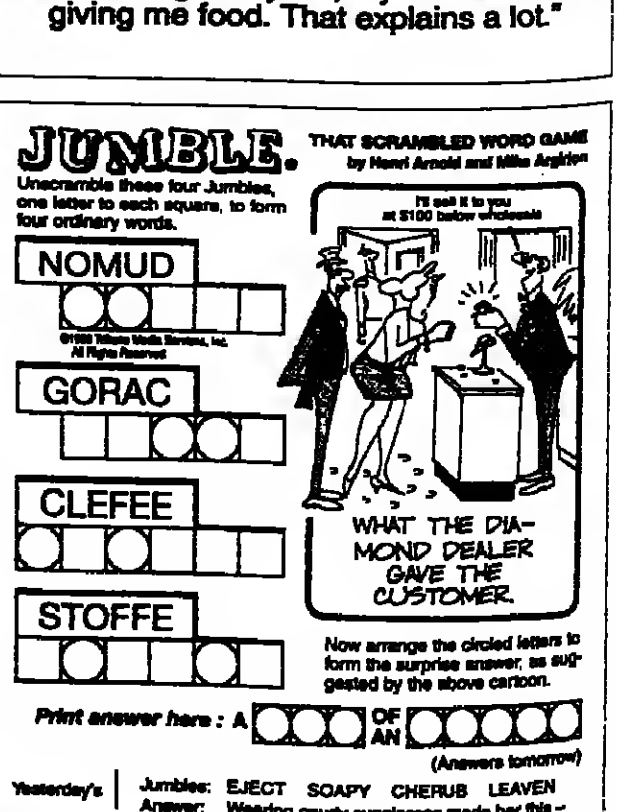
STOFFE

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print answer here: A _ _ _ _ _ OF _ _ _ _ _

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumble: EJECT SOAPY CHERUB LEAVEN
Answer: Wearing gaudy sunglasses made her life a SPECTACLE



Busi

A re

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THE PALESTIN

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The

Major Cl

Currency	US\$
US Dollar	0.88
DE Mark	1.61
GB Sterling	0.81
CH Franc	0.81
JP Yen	0.00
CA Dollar	0.68
IT Lira	0.00
NL Guilder	0.48
FR Franc	0.16

Currency	US\$
US Dollar	1.47
Jordan Dinar	0.28
Saudi Riyal	2.88
Bahrain Dinar	0.27
Qatar Dinar	0.27
Kuwait Dinar	0.27
Emirates Dinar	0.27
Lebanese L1000	0.28
Egyptian	0.28

Energy

Oil	Last	Prev
Brent	14.97	14.85
WTI	14.95	14.82
Bony	14.97	14.85
Debel	13.86	13.73
UL Gas	162.00	160.00

Metal Prices

Metal	US\$
Gold (oz's)	287.00
Silver (oz's)	6.78
Platinum (oz's)	378.00
Al (3 Months)	160.00
Cu (3 Months)	170.00
Zinc (3 Months)	111.00
Lead (3 Months)	112.00
Ni (3 Months)	64.00

Boorse

City	DO
New York	DO
New York	DO
London	DO
Tokyo	DO
Paris	DO
Frankfurt	DO

Energy

Commodity	US\$
Coffee (c/b)	1.47
Cocoa (c/b)	1.47
Sugar (c/b)	1.47
Wheat (c/b)	1.47
Soybeans (c/b)	1.47
Yeast (c/b)	1.47
Barley (c/b)	1.47
Rice (c/b)	1.47

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Daily Business Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Study reveals latest statistics on poverty and unemployment

**** A PRELIMINARY** draft of a study prepared by the Royal Scientific Society reveals that 26 per cent of Jordanian families live in absolute poverty and that around 4.5 per cent of the families are under the abject poverty line. The study showed 68 per cent of the poor live in the three most populated and urbanised governorates of Amman, Zarqa and Irbid.

As for unemployment, the study found that the jobless rate is only 14.2 per cent with the most affected being young people below 27 years old who accounted for 76.9 per cent of the unemployed. The jobless whose education was below the level of Tawjihi (the general certificate for completing high school) represented about 48.5 per cent of the unemployed.

It was noted that unemployment among the educated people started to rise from 1987 especially among community college graduates who account for 24.3 per cent of jobless. Most suffering because of unemployment and poverty, the study indicated, are limited income employees who, as a result of price rises, see the real value of their incomes diminish.

"Unless real care is taken in dealing with this group, the situation could lead to corruption in the form of bribery instead of improving productivity and efficiency in the public sector as those limited income people try to maintain their previous standard of living," the study concluded (Al Dustour).

Jordan Trade Association prepares to hold fairs in Algeria and Gaza

**** THE PALESTINIAN** Ministry of Economy and Trade has approved a request by the Jordan Trade Association to hold the first Jordanian industrial fair in Gaza in April. Some 40 industrial companies representing electrical, food and other sectors will participate in the fair.

Another industrial fair is to be held in Algeria during the first half of this year. This fair comes within the activities planned by the Jordan Trade Association during 1998 in a drive to open export markets for Jordanian products. Algeria is considered among the markets that have a high purchasing power and a number of Jordanian pharmaceutical companies export large quantities of medicines to Algeria.

There is also an opportunity to export clothing, chemical materials, foodstuffs, home appliances and cleaning materials to Algeria, the association's director general, Halim Abu Rahneh, has said (Al Aswaaq).

Asia crisis hits growing number of European banks

PARIS (AFP) — The fallout from the Asian financial crisis spread to a growing number of European banks on Friday, as a leading credit rating agency added one British and four German banks to its list of candidates for a downgrade.

U.S. financial rating agency Moody's said Friday it was putting some ratings of German banks WestLB, Bayerische Landesbank, Norddeutsche Landesbank and Commerzbank, the country's third largest bank, on credit watch with negative implications.

This effectively means that the agency is reviewing its assessment of the quality of the bank's outstanding loans and the probability of trouble-free repayment with the expectation of downgrading its view.

The agency said that looking beyond individual factors relating to each bank, WestLB, Bayerische and Commerzbank were marked by "relatively high exposure to the turbulence reigning on several East Asia markets."

Norddeutsche Landesbank, it said, was particularly exposed in South Korea.

Moody's also targeted British bank Standard Chartered's credit rating on review for a possible downgrade because of concern over its exposure to the crisis in Asia, where the bank does most of its business.

Some 60 per cent of Standard Chartered's profits in the first half of 1997 came from the region.

This rating action reflects increased concern over the possible negative impact on Standard Chartered's financial strength of continued political and economic uncertainty in the Asia Pacific region, in which the bank operates.

Moody's said in a statement.

The credit-rating agency also said it was particularly concerned about the bank's exposure to the "more stressed economies" of Indonesia, Thailand and South Korea.

Another cause for concern was the bank's strong presence in Malaysia.

Friday's moves by Moody's followed an announcement late Wednesday that it was placing French state-owned bank Credit Lyonnais' credit ratings on review for a possible downgrade because of its high level of outstanding debts in crisis-hit Asian countries.

Credit Lyonnais has some \$12 billion in outstanding loans in Asia, of which some \$8 billion are in the countries suffering worst from the crisis, including \$3.8 billion in South Korea.

But banks across Europe are heavily exposed to a fallout risk from the Asia crisis.

French banks' total exposure in Asia excluding Japan is about \$40.3 billion, while German banks are owed some \$47 billion in outstanding loans and British banks some \$29.6 billion, according to Bank for International Settlement figures.

U.S. banks' commitments in the region total \$32.2 billion.

The action taken by Moody's on Friday is unlikely to be the end of the story. The agency said Thursday that it was reviewing all banks' positions and that other announcements of credit watch or downgrades could follow.

One bank cited was Societe Generale, whose engagements in Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines alone total \$7.2 billion, according to Paribas figures.

But U.S. investment bank Merrill Lynch said in a study published Friday that Societe Generale and Banque Nationale de Paris, also heavily exposed in Asia, are likely to retain their current credit ratings because they have sufficient resources to cope with their Asian risk.

Credit Lyonnais, however, is likely to see its ratings lowered because of its low profit margin for increased Asian risk.

And Merrill Lynch

warned that if there is a general financial collapse in Asia, many more banks will see their credit ratings cut.

European officials are meanwhile beginning to acknowledge that the effect of the Asian crisis in this part of the world may be worse than expected, with French Finance Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn saying late Thursday that he had underestimated the size of the problem, and that the risks of it "spreading geographically persist."

AN AGREEMENT was signed between the JETT Buses Company and Coca-Cola granting the soft drinks company the rights to advertise its products on Channel 3, which is the advertising agency responsible for screening on the buses.

In accordance with the agreement Coca-Cola products such as Coca-Cola, Fanta and Sprite, have also become the official drinks served on board buses travelling between Amman and Aqaba, Damascus and Cairo. This enables travellers to enjoy their favourite soft drink on these trips.

This agreement is yet another step in the Coca-Cola Company's policy of ensuring that its products are within an arm's reach of anyone to enjoy their favourite flavour of Coca-Cola, specially since the Jordanian market is experiencing an unprecedented request for Coca-Cola products.

Le Meridien Winter Passport set to reach new levels of success

THE POPULAR Winter Passport special rates promotion offered annually by Le Meridien Hotels and Resorts and Forte Hotels worldwide is set to reach new levels in sales this year. Winter Passport for the 1996/7 winter season generated more than 600,000 pounds worth of business for the successful hotel chain, with projected figures for the 1997/98 season set at one million pounds.

Commenting on the benefits of Winter Passport, Russell Sharpe, senior vice president, sales & marketing Middle East, India and Africa said: "Winter Passport offers up to 50 per cent discount on published rates during the winter season at selected Le Meridien Hotels and Resorts and Forte Hotels around the world, including key cities and resorts in North and South America, the Caribbean, Middle East, Africa and Indian Ocean, Asia Pacific and Europe."

REUTERS REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	GBP	CHF	JPY	DEM	FRF	ITL	ESP	YEN
US Dollar	1.0000	0.6555	0.6555	106.63	1.9364	166.37	2036.26	166.37	106.63
DE Mark	0.6555	1.0000	0.6555	153.36	1.9364	166.37	2036.26	166.37	153.36
GB Sterling	1.5478	1.0000	0.6555	160.33	2.9364	249.60	3066.26	249.60	160.33
CH Franc	0.6555	0.6555	1.0000	136.75	1.9364	166.37	2036.26	166.37	136.75
JP Yen	0.0094	0.0065	0.0065	1.0000	1.9364	166.37	2036.26	166.37	1.0000
CA Dollar	0.6555	0.6555	0.6555	106.63	1.9364	166.37	2036.26	166.37	106.63
IT Lira	0.0002	0.0002	0.0002	2036.26	1.9364	166.37	1.0000	166.37	2036.26
NL Guilder	0.0036	0.0025	0.0025	363.63	1.9364	166.37	2036.26	166.37	363.63
FR Franc	0.0065	0.0046	0.0046	655.95	1.9364	166.37	2036.26	166.37	655.95

Middle Eastern Currencies									
Currency	USD	GBP	CHF	JPY	DEM	FRF	ITL	ESP	YEN
Jordan Dinar	0.7090	0.4610	0.4610	70.90	1.3573	114.70	1408.70	114.70	70.90
Saudi Riyal	0.2666	0.1722	0.1722	26.66	0.5284	44.38	554.78	44.38	26.66
Bahraini Dinar	0.2475	0.1590	0.1590	24.75	0.4817	40.18	502.28	40.18	24.75
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.1767	0.1767	27.47	0.5284	44.38	554.78	44.38	27.47
Kuwait Dinar	0.2874	0.1868	0.1868	28.74	0.5617	46.78	584.78	46.78	28.74
Emirate Dinar	0.2725	0.1760	0.1760	27.25	0.5284	44.38	554.78	44.38	27.25
Lebanese L1000	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	1.0000	0.0002	0.0002	2.0000	0.0002	1.0000
Egyptian	0.2335	0.1508	0.1508	23.35	0.4610	38.43	484.38	38.43	23.35

Mid-East Currencies									
Currency	USD	GBP	CHF	JPY	DEM	FRF	ITL	ESP	YEN
SA Riyal	0.2666	0.1722	0.1722	26.66	0.5284	44.38	554.78	44.38	26.66
AE Dirham	0.2725	0.1760	0.1760	27.25	0.5284	44.38	554.78	44.38	27.25
KW Dinar	0.2874	0.1868	0.1868	28.74	0.5617	46.78	584.78	46.78	28.74
SH Dinar	0.2747	0.1767	0.1767	27.47	0.5284	44.38	554.78	44.38	27.47
CY Pound	0.2775	0.1790	0.1790	27.75	0.5317	44.78	559.78	44.78	27.75

Currency Deposit Rates (Bids)									
Period	1-3	3-6	6-12	12-18	18-24	24-36	36-48	48-60	60-72
USD	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.10	0.11	0.12
GBP	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.10	0.11
JPY	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.09
DEM	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.10
FRF	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.09
ITL	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.09

Main Equity Indices									
Source	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Chg	Open	Close
New York	DOW JONES	7763.65	81.78	0.8	7803.12	7694.51	7801.77	7763.65	7763.65
New York	S&P 500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
London	FT-SE 100	6273.8	10.0	0.2	6312.8	6265.7	6265.8	6273.8	6273.8
Tokyo	Nikkei 225	18282.04	218.09	1.24	18481.4	18063.3	18063.8	18282.04	18282.04
Paris	CAC 40	2886.05	10.36	0.36	2916.51	2865.34	2865.34	2886.05	2886.05
Frankfurt	DAX	4284.84	100.23	2.4	4384.05	4184.62	4184.62	4284.84	4284.84

JDD Cross Rates									
Currency	Buy	Sell	Buy	Sell	Buy	Sell	Buy	Sell	Buy
US Dollar	0.708	0.710	0.708	0.710	0.708	0.710	0.708	0.710	0.708
GB Sterling	1.578	1.587	1.578	1.587	1.578	1.587	1.578	1.587	1.578
DE Mark	0.3851	0.387	0.3851	0.387	0.3851	0.387	0.3851	0.387	0.3851
CH Franc	0.4723	0.4747	0.4723	0.4747	0.4723	0.4747	0.4723	0.4747	0.4723
FR Franc	0.110	0.1108	0.110	0.1108	0.110	0.1108	0.110	0.1108	0.110
JP Yen	0.0087	0.0086	0.0087	0.0086	0.0087	0.0086	0.0087	0.0086	0.0087
NL Guilder	0.3418	0.3435	0.3418	0.3435	0.3418	0.3435	0.3418	0.3435	0.3418
IT Lira	0.3911	0.3931	0.3911	0.3931	0.3911	0.3931	0.3911	0.3931	0.3911

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Williams show dominates Australian Open

MELBOURNE (AFP) — The Williams sisters took the Australian Open by storm Monday, knocking out one of four seeds to fall and upstaging even men's World No. 1 Pete Sampras on centre court.

Serena Williams, 16, unseeded and playing her first Grand Slam event, came back to beat Romanian sixth seed Irina Spirlea 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-1.

Venus Williams, 17 and one of the bookies favourites for the tournament, hammered French challenger Alexia Dechaume-Balleret 6-3, 6-0 in just 49 minutes.

The two will now play in the second round in what is certain to be one of the highlights of the tournament in its 10th anniversary year at Melbourne Park.

In between their performances, Sampras was almost a sideshow as he cruised into the second round 7-5, 6-4, 6-2 against unheralded Dutchman Sjeng Schalken.

But there was other drama. Byron Black of Zimbabwe beat men's 14th seed Felix Mantilla of Spain 6-4, 6-0, 4-6, 6-4. Tenth seed Sergi Bruguera, also of Spain, withdrew from his first round match against Karol Kucera of Slovakia because of badly blistered feet.

Natasha Zvereva of Belarus beat Sabine Appelmans of Belgium, the women's 12th seed, 2-6, 6-2, 6-3.

A record 29,398 people packed into Melbourne Park eager to see the new young stars make their mark. There were another 10,000 people for the evening session when Australia's 15th seed Mark Philippoussis beat Spain's Alex Calatrava 7-6 (7/0), 6-4, 7-6 (7/4).

Spirlea lost to Venus Williams in an acrimonious U.S. Open semi-final last year and the 27-year-old Romanian must be feeling like a serial victim of the Williams family.

She was a set up and had a break in the second set before Serena made her dramatic comeback.



Seventeen-year-old Venus Williams plays a backhand shot during her first round match against Alexia Dechaume-Balleret from France at the Australian Open in Melbourne January 19. Williams won in straight sets 6-3 6-0 (Reuters photo)

Serena Williams found the key to victory by stopping hitting the ball to Spirlea's forehand.

The Romanian came off the court stoney-faced about her second defeat at the hands of the sisters. "I don't want to think about it," she said.

Asked what her reaction was when she found out she would have to play Serena, Spirlea replied: "Very annoyed. Do you really want to know ... I don't think so."

The Williams girls admit they have already discussed the possibility of playing each other, though they may not like the idea of clashing so soon.

"Young Serena will want to beat me, so I better be ready," Venus told her press conference, adding that her sister was "the only person I would be happy losing to."

"I am sure Venus will want to win," Serena told

her separate audience. "I think it might be a little bit more than Irina did today, so it is going to be a good match."

Even though she is not seeded, Venus is joint second favourite to win the women's title with Mary Pierce of France. First seed Martina Hingis plays Tuesday.

The rest of the new band of teenagers chasing the number one rankings had a mixed day.

Mirjana Lucic, 15 and the youngest competitor in the \$6.5 million tournament, swept past Rennae Stubbs of Australia 7-5, 6-1.

But Lleyton Hewitt, the 16-year-old Australian who this month became the third youngest winner of a men's tour event, went down to Daniel Vacek of the Czech Republic 6-2, 6-4, 1-6, 2-6, 6-3 in the first match on centre court.

Twelfth seed Appelmans was also a set up before she let Zvereva back into the game. "I'm tired and I need a break from tennis," she said.

Women's second seed Lindsay Davenport had no problems beating Amelie Cocheteux of France 6-2, 6-3. Fourth seed Iva Majoli of Croatia

beat Japan's Naoko Sawamatsu 6-4, 6-2.

Eighth seed Conchita Martinez of Spain beat Germany's Sandra Kloesel, while 15th ranked Ruxandra Dragomir was the first seed to go through, beating Meike Babel of Germany.

Men's champion Sampras encountered little resistance reaching the second round, where he will play Italy's Davide Sanguinetti, another unfancied opponent.

"I had a good serving day. I just wanted to get through the first match as best I could, it was a good solid day."

Fourth seed Jonas Bjorkman had to come back from a set down against Australian wild card Allen Belobrajdic but came out on top 2-6, 6-1, 6-1, 6-1. Sixth seed Petr Korda of Czech Republic beat Albert Portas of Spain 6-3, 4-6, 6-1, 6-4.

Spanish seeds Carlos Moya and Alex Corretja also had no problem. Moya, losing finalist to Sampras last year beat Australia's Peter Tramacchi.

Eleventh seed Corretja ended the hopes of Lucas Arnold of Argentina.



World No. 1 and defending champion Pete Sampras of the U.S. waves to the crowd on centre court after his first round match against Sjeng Schalken of the Netherlands at the Australian Open in Melbourne. Sampras won in straight sets 7-5 6-4 6-2 (Reuters photo)

SCOREBOARD

NBA			
Indiana	103	Boston	96
Chicago	106	Houston	100
San Antonio	98	Milwaukee	92 (OT)
Phoenix	96	Miami	87
Portland	94	Denver	82

NHL			
Washington	3	Chicago	2
Buffalo	6	Vancouver	2
Colorado	2	San Jose	2 (OT)

Portuguese First Division			
Amadora	1	Salgueiros	0
Varzim	2	Belenenses	1
Rio Ave	0	Farense	3
Vitoria Setubal	0	Guimaraes	0
Campomaiorense	2	Boavista	2
FC Porto	2	Maritimo	1
A. Coimbra	1	D. Chaves	2

Spanish First Division			
Oviedo	3	Zaragoza	0
Celta Vigo	1	Espanyol	0
Valladolid	2	Atletico Madrid	1
Compostela	3	Merida	0
Athletic Bilbao	0	Betis	0
Real Madrid	1	Salamanca	0
R. Santander	3	Real Sociedad	1
Tenerife	2	Sporting Gijon	1
Majorca	0	D. La Coruna	0

French Cup			
Caen	1	Toulouse	0
Lens	2	Le Havre	1
Le Mans	1	Metz	1
Bastia	1	Niort	0
Cannes	2	Valence	0
S.-Denis/S.-Leu0	0	Lyon	2
Epinal	2	Strasbourg	1
Thouars	1	Paris SG	3
Sete	0	Marseille	3
Dijon	1	Monaco	2 (AET)
Aubervilliers	1	Bordeaux	7
Segre	1	Auxerre	2
Bretignolles	0	Nantes	3
Toulon	4	Nice	2 (AET)
Rennes	1	Chateauroux	0
Thionville	1	Guingamp	5

English Premiership			
Everton	3	Chelsea	1

Greek Football			
AEK	3	PAOK	0
Panathinaikos	2	Panionios	1
Ionikos	1	Apollon	1
Heraklis	3	Panathiki	1
OFI	2	Xanthi	1
Pyrros	1	Kalamata	1
Athinaikos	1	Proodeftiki	0
Kavala	0	Veria	1

Italian Serie A			
Atalanta	1	Udinese	1
Bologna	1	Juventus	3
Fiorentina	1	Lazio	3
Inter Milan	0	Bari	1
Lecco	1	Sampdoria	3
Napoli	0	Brescia	3
AS Roma	1	Piacenza	1
Vicenza	1	Empoli	0

Real pocket the points but win few cheers

MADRID (AFP) — Real Madrid were booed and jeered by their fans as they snatched an unimpressive 1-0 victory over modest Salamanca Sunday to go top of the Spanish first division — at least until rivals Barcelona play their Monday match against Valencia.

Real now have 43 points from 21 matches while Barcelona have 41 from only 19 matches.

The Real victory was due to Italian striker Christian Panucci who managed to score the only goal of the encounter after 21 minutes. It was also his first goal since joining the legendary Spanish club twelve months ago.

Real promptly grew careless, settled back and nearly paid the price when Salamanca surged forward and twice went close before the half-time whistle through Puuleta and Lombardi.

The home side, looking particularly ragged and clearly missing the influential Fernando Redondo and striker Pedrag Mijatovic, brought on new recruits Savio of Brazil and Christian Karembeu of France. But the newcomers clearly need time to adapt to their new team.

In the day's other important match, Athletic Bilbao were held to a 0-0 draw by Betis but stay in fourth place in the standings — equal on points with Real Sociedad who slumped to a 3-1 defeat — their first loss in 18 matches — at Racing Santander.

An own-goal and a penalty may not be the best way to score winning goals but Valladolid were not complaining after scoring a 2-1 home victory over Atletico Saturday.

In Saturday's other matches Oviedo beat Zaragoza 3-0 and Celta Vigo defeated Espanyol 1-0.

250 Bulls' guard Mic... in the first quarter

bulls down

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Organisers welcome N. Korea's entry to Winter Olympics

China hoping for first gold at Nagano

NAGANO (AFP) — The presence of North Korean competitors in the Winter Olympics here will be a welcome boost for Asian participation, organisers said Monday.

Although a final announcement has yet to be made, North Korean speed skaters are certain to compete as they have already cleared qualification.

Nagano Olympic Organising Committee (NAOC) officials said.

"We welcome their entry because North Korea is one of the few Asian countries participating in the Nagano Olympics," said Haruo Umegaki, an NAOC official.

"Since the Winter Olympics will take place this time in the region, we hope as many Asian athletes as possible will join the Games," he said.

Organisers received Olympic applications from Pyongyang last week for the participation of 10

speedskaters — eight on short track and two on regular rink.

Besides Japan, other participants from East Asia are expected from China, South Korea and Taiwan.

Most Central Asian countries, including Mongolia and Kazakhstan, are expected to join the Games, which starts on February 7, but no Southeast Asian countries have applied, the

official said.

"It's a little bit sad if Olympics to be held in Asia will be dominated by Europeans, Russians and North Americans as usual," Umegaki said. "But with the participation of North Korea and other neighbouring countries, we hope we can show the Asian colours to the world."

Russia tops the Winter Games medal list with 98

gold medals, followed by Germany with 83 and Norway 73. From Asia, South Korea has won six gold followed by Japan with three.

If the North Korean's compete here it would be their first Winter Olympics appearance since Albertville in 1991. Pyongyang did not participate in the Lillehammer Games in Norway four

years ago.

North Korea's participation here had been in doubt as the country, hit by food shortages, cancelled a series of preparatory meetings last year.

Despite missing the registration deadline, North Korea sent a small team to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, but did not take part in last year's East Asian Games in the South Korean city of Pusan. The communist nation also boycotted the 1994 Asian Games in the Japanese city of Hiroshima.

The number of participating nations at the Nagano Games is expected to top 71, breaking the present record of 70 countries at Lillehammer.

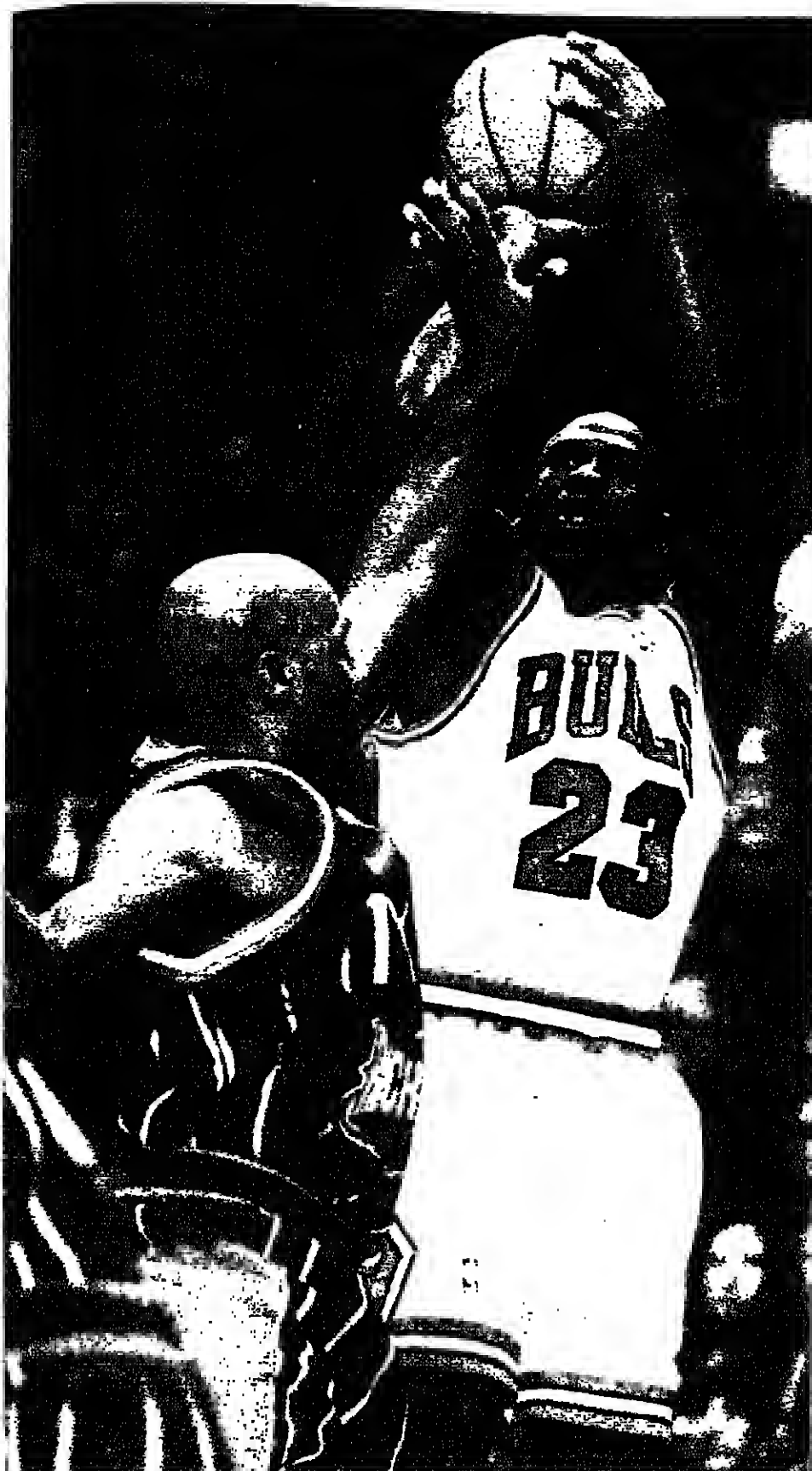
Japan has been the only Asian host of the Winter Games, with the Olympics held in the northern city of Sapporo in 1972.



Sweden's Jonas Bjorkman reaches for a forehand return against Australia's Allen Belobrajdic during their first round match at the Australian open in Melbourne. Bjorkman won 2-6 6-1 6-1 6-1 (Reuters photo)

TODAY AT	PHILADELPHIA "1" BULLETPROOF Shows: 12:30, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	PHILADELPHIA "2" George Clooney Nicole Kidman ... in THE PEACEMAKER Shows: 12:30, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	PLAZA NOTHING TO LOSE Show: 12:00 2:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	CONCORD Nadya Al Jundi, Ahmad Bedeir & Nahla Salameh...in RIDING HIGH Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:15, 8:15, 10:30	GALLERIA 2 BEVERLY HILLS NINJA Shows: 2:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	GALLERIA 1 FOOLS RUSH IN Shows: 2:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	Hisham Yanes Theatre TEL: 625155 NOW ON DAILY THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas For reservations call 640155, 625155

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Chicago Bulls' guard Michael Jordan shoots in front of Houston Rockets' Rodrick Rhodes in the first quarter of game in Chicago (Reuters photo)

Bulls down Rockets 106-100

BOSTON (AP) — Rik Smits scored 25 points as the Pacers beat the Celtics 103-96 Sunday in Larry Bird's first game in Boston as Indiana's coach.

The Celtics retired Robert Parish's No. 00 at halftime, picking this game so Bird could be present. But Bird, taking the parquet floor for the first time with another team, stole the spotlight from his former teammate.

He received a standing ovation when he came onto the floor before the game, another after he was introduced and another after a reel of his highlights was shown on the scoreboard.

Jalen Rose scored 20 points for Indiana, which won its fifth straight game. Ron Mercer led Boston with 21 points.

Bird played 13 years for the Celtics, won three National Basketball Association titles and had his No. 33 retired by the team on Feb. 4, 1993. But he took over his hometown Pacers last spring even though the Celtics' job was open, saying he didn't want to tarnish his image in Boston with a potentially unpleasant rebuilding effort.

Chicago Bulls 106, Houston Rockets 100: In Chicago, Michael Jordan scored 45 points, including a pair of key 3-pointers in the final quarter, and the Chicago Bulls overcame a spirited performance by Charles Barkley to beat the Houston Rockets.

Barkley, jawing, yapping and exchanging barbs with his good friend Jordan, scored 35 points — 19 over his average — and had 14 rebounds for the Rockets, who have lost 10 of their last 14 games.

The Rockets played without injured stars Hakeem Olajuwon and Clyde Drexler and then lost guard Mario Elie with 6:54 left in the first half when he strained his left shoulder after colliding under the basket with Scottie Pippen.

But every time it looked like the Bulls would run away, Houston fought back with determined play from Barkley, who made 11-of-14 field goal attempts.

San Antonio Spurs 98, Milwaukee Bucks 92: Overtime: In Milwaukee, David Robinson had 30 points and 15 rebounds, and Tim Duncan had 20 points and 11 rebounds as the San Antonio Spurs beat the Milwaukee Bucks in overtime.

The Spurs scored the first eight points in overtime to win their fifth straight and 17th of their last 19. It was San Antonio's first

overtime win of the season after three losses.

The Bucks, who lost the last two games of their homestand after winning the first three, were led by Terrell Brandon with 19 points. Milwaukee's Glenn Robinson, the league's third-leading scorer with a 23-point average, missed the game with the flu.

Phoenix Suns 96, Miami Heat 87: In Phoenix, Antonio McDyess scored 20 points and Jason Kidd just missed a triple-double as the Phoenix Suns beat the Miami Heat.

Kidd had nine points, 13 assists and 10 rebounds, falling one point short of his third triple-double in his last 12 games.

The Suns built a 25-point lead in the first half and then held off the Heat, who lost their third consecutive game for the first time this season.

Jamal Mashburn led Miami with 25 points. Alonzo Mourning had 17 points and was 6-for-6 from the field, but played only 19 minutes before fouling out with 7:08 remaining.

Portland Trail Blazers 94, Denver Nuggets 82: At Portland, Oregon, Gary Trent scored a career-high 27 points as the Portland Trail Blazers handed the Denver Nuggets their 20th straight loss, 94-82 Sunday night.

The Nuggets tied the second-longest, single-season losing streak in NBA history. The Philadelphia 76ers lost 20 straight during 1972-73 and the Dallas Mavericks did the same during 1993-94.

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Resurgent Everton give Chelsea the blues

LONDON (AFP) — Chelsea lost further ground in the race for the English Premiership title as Everton came from behind to grab a crucial 3-1 win which lifted them clear of the relegation zone on Sunday.

Chelsea, who remain in third place seven points behind leaders Manchester United, took the lead on 37 minutes through Tony Andre Flo before Gary Speed levelled the scores moments later.

Everton stepped up the pressure in the second half and took a deserved lead on 62 minutes when giant Scot Duncan Ferguson rose above the Blues defence to score with a trademark header.

Everton sealed the points seven minutes from time when Chelsea defender Michael Duberry fired into his own net as he tried to clear the ball under pressure from Ferguson.

Everton's second successive victory — they won 3-1 at Crystal Palace last weekend — lifts them four places up the table to 13th and provides further evidence that their season may finally have turned for the better.

Norwegian ace Flo, who Everton tried to buy at the end of last season, put Chelsea in front on 37 minutes after capitalising on confusion in the home defence.

England wing back Graeme Le Saux swung over a cross from left which Everton failed to clear at several attempts before Flo stuck out a boot to stab the ball past his compatriot Tomas Myhre in the Everton goal.

But within two minutes, Everton were level, silencing the 2,000 euphoric Chelsea fans who had made the long trip from west London to Liverpool.

Former England star Nick Barmby chipped a delicate lob from the right of the area to the far post for Speed to poke the ball in from the tightest of angles after Frenchman Mikael Madar had seen his header cleared off the line.

Chelsea were without the injured Dennis Wise and Gianfranco Zola and the suspended Roberto Di Matteo, but had the better of a scrappy first half in which Everton continually gave away possession.

Everton had the chance to take the lead 10 minutes after the break when a sustained assault on the Chelsea goal ended with Eddie Newton throwing himself full length to clear a shot off the line from Madar.

Five minutes later Madar seemed certain to score when he was clean through on goal, only to see his powerful low shot cannon off the legs of Chelsea goalkeeper Ed de Goey.

But from the ensuing corner, the Merseysiders took the lead which their mounting pressure deserved when Ferguson rose to power home an unstoppable header.

Chelsea player-manager Ruud Gullit brought himself as the Londoners poured forward in search of the equaliser, but any hopes of a positive result were dashed when Duberry put the ball into his own net on 84 minutes.

Klinsmann plans to bow out in style

LONDON (AFP) — Tottenham chairman Alan Sugar hopes Jurgen Klinsmann, who has said he plans to retire after the World Cup finals in France, will lead Spurs to Premiership safety before bowing out.

The 33-year-old German striker has said he intends to call it a day after this year's World Cup finals in France and Sugar said: "I'm sure everyone in football would like Jurgen Klinsmann's last season in football to be a memorable one."

Klinsmann, whose first goal of his second spell at White Hart Lane earned Spurs a 1-0 win over West Ham on Saturday, told German radio station ARD of his plans to retire after France 98.

"I will not play in the 2000 European Championships," he vowed. "I will retire."

"He has been an impeccable role model and a professional throughout his career. He came to help us out at Tottenham to the end of this season and we sincerely hope he goes out on a high note. He deserves it."

Klinsmann's first spell with Spurs ended in acrimonious circumstances in 1995 when he exercised a get-out clause in his contract to go to Bayern Munich and then Sampdoria.

Furious Sugar famously criticised Klinsmann and said his number 18 Spurs shirt was not good enough to wash his car with.

But Klinsmann had no hesitation in making an extraordinary return to the Premiership strugglers for a fee of £175,000 in December with a contract until the end of the season.

His spell in Sampdoria had been ruined by an ankle ligament injury and he scored only two goals in eight appearances.

Klinsmann's career highlights include winning the World Cup in Italy in 1990, the European Championship in England in 1996, and the 1996 UEFA Cup with Bayern Munich.



German footballer Jurgen Klinsmann smiles during a news conference. German captain and Tottenham Hotspur striker Jurgen Klinsmann says he will end his international career after this year's World Cup finals (Reuters photo)

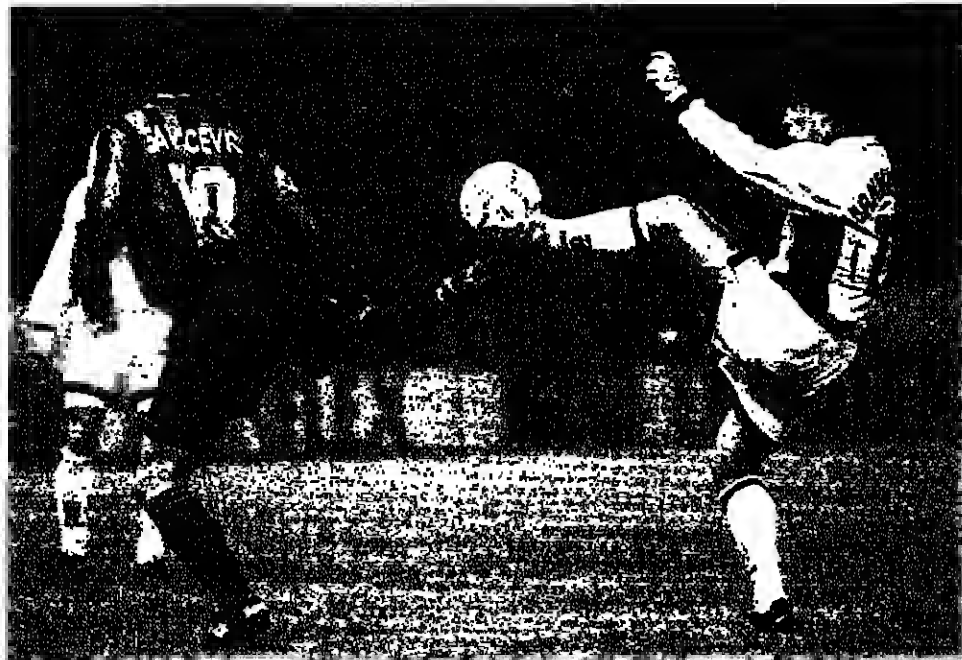
Inter crash to Bari as Parma move up to 4th

PARIS (AFP) — South African Phil Masinga brought Italian league leaders Inter Milan to their knees on Sunday, when he scored lowly Bari's matchwinner in a shock 1-0 victory. And to make matters worse Inter's lead over Juventus at the top of the Serie A was slashed from four points to just one as the reigning champions trounced Bologna 3-1.

French first division giants Strasbourg, reduced to ten men after defender Jean-Luc Dogon was sent off after just 11 minutes, crashed out of the French Cup on Saturday when they were beaten 2-1 by third division minnows Epinal. Other elite clubs Metz and Monaco survived ... but only just. Metz needed a penalty shoot-out to get past second division Le Mans after being held 1-1 and Monaco were severely tested away to the part-timers Dijon before clinching a 2-1 win in extra-time.

Inter's shock defeat came when Masinga, a former Leeds United ace, stabbed home a loose ball after Inter goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca parried his header. It was only the second time Inter have been beaten in the league this season.

Inter coach Gigi Simoni admitted: "Obviously we're disappointed. We started well and we could have scored two



AC Milan's striker Dejan Savicevic (L) challenges Parma's Fabio Cannavaro (R) for the ball during early action in their Italian first division soccer match in Parma (Reuters photo)

or three times ... but that's football.

"We're not a team that gets shattered when we lose, like today, and we're not excessively euphoric when we win. We're just going to carry on our way and hope that next Sunday we can redeem ourselves."

Inter have now lost three of their last five games between league and cup, while Ronaldo saw a string of efforts either saved or flash wide.

Juventus, who have the best attack in Italy, wasted no time with Bologna.

Filippo Inzaghi scored twice from close range in the first 20 minutes and Alessandro Del Piero cracked home a 25-yard free-kick on the hour. Russian Igor Kolyvanov notched Bologna's consolation goal in injury time.

Third-placed Udinese drew 1-1 away to Atalanta while Parma moved up to fourth after scoring two stunning

goals in a 3-1 win over AC Milan in the night match.

There was crowd trouble when Napoli's season of misery continued with a 3-0 home defeat to Brescia — their 12th in 16 league games.

Elsewhere, lowly Piacenza snatched a late equaliser to draw 1-1 with AS Roma at the Olympic stadium, while Vincenzo Montella scored twice in Sampdoria's 3-1 victory over Lecce and Vicenza won 1-0 at Empoli.



France's Didier Auriol in his Toyota at the start of the 66th Monte Carlo Rally in Casino Square. The 114 competitors in the 1458 km classic rally wind through southern France for three days, ending back in Monaco (Reuters photo)

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TAMMAM HIRSH

BAIT THE TRAP WELL

Both vulnerable. North deals.

NORTH

♠ A Q 3

♥ 8 3

♦ K Q 2

♣ Q 7 5 2

WEST

♠ J 9 8 4

♥ 9 5 2

♦ A J 7 6

♣ J 9

EAST

♠ 10 7 3

♥ K Q J 7 6

♦ 10 8 3

♣ K 4

SOUTH

♠ K 6 5

♥ A 10 4

♦ 8 5 4

♣ A 10 8 3

The bidding:

NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST

1♠ 1♥ 1NT Pass

3NT Pass

Opening lead: Nine of ♣

Great defenders are here, not made. Follow this spectacular effort by former world champion Bob Goldman of Dallas, from an international tournament some years ago.

Given the fact that South's jump to two no trump was invitational, the auction was straightforward. All that remained was for declarer to make nine tricks before the opponents got five.

West led a heart and declarer allowed East's jack to win the first trick, and had to hold off again when East continued with the

queen. After winning the third heart, South's problem was to keep East off lead while developing the club suit.

South was 1980 world champion Christian Mari of Paris, and he made a good shot when he crossed to dummy with the queen of spades and led the queen of clubs. East covered with the king, and Goldman dropped the jack under declarer's ace.

Suddenly, declarer had an opportunity for nine tricks without having to rely on West holding the ace of diamonds. It seemed that, with the marked finesse for the nine of clubs, declarer could score five club tricks, three spades and the ace of hearts without raising a sweat. That was not quite how things worked out.

Declarer crossed to dummy with the ace of spades, led the deuce of clubs and, when East produced the four, confidently finessed the eight. A laydown contract could now no longer be made.

West won the nine of clubs and led another spade, forcing out the king. Now, before declarer could set up the tenth trick to diamonds, Goldman could rise with the ace on the first lead of that suit and cash a high spade for the setting trick. The defenders collected two more tricks, and one in each of the other suits for a one-trick set. A stellar performance.

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Egypt's reporters, opposition parties criticise new press law

CAIRO (AP) — The union representing Egyptian journalists on Monday urged President Hosni Mubarak not to sign legislation that would require government permits for new publications.

The Journalists Syndicate — which represents the nation's reporters, editors and photographers — said that the bill would limit freedom of speech.

Opposition parties, which publish a variety of dailies and weeklies, said they will launch a campaign to protest the legislation.

The bill, passed Saturday by the parliament, amends

an existing law that allowed specially formed "media companies" to publish newspapers without a licence. Under the amendment, licences now will be required.

The law must be signed by Mr. Mubarak before it goes into effect.

Information Minister Safwat Al Sherif was quoted by the Al Osboa weekly as saying: "The new law is only procedural and should not be taken as against freedom of the press. The state is keen that freedom of the press should not be infiltrated by parasites and strangers."

At present, only the gov-

ernment, political parties and media companies that are well capitalised can issue periodicals.

To avoid Egypt's registration process, many periodicals publish abroad and only distribute in Egypt.

The journalists argue that anyone should be allowed to publish in Egypt and that no government permit should be required.

A statement issued by the Journalists Syndicate called the legislation "a new backslide on freedom of expression which contradicts the principles of the constitution."

The syndicate represents some 4,000 journalists.

Israel chides EU over statement on Palestinian economy

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel challenged on Monday a lengthy European Union (EU) report on the troubled Middle East peace process, saying it ignored Israeli efforts to help develop the Palestinian economy.

"It is our impression that there is no appropriate reference [in the EU report] to the efforts that Israel has recently made to improve the Palestinian economy," the Israeli foreign ministry said in a statement.

The ministry was

responding to a 23-page report issued by the European Commission last week which called for a review of EU-Israeli relations if Israel proves unable to achieve "tangible results" in peace negotiations with the Arabs.

The commission notably called for "rapid progress towards eliminating all obstacles to Palestinian economic development" which it said notably included repeated Israeli security closures of the occupied ter-

ritories.

Taking a conciliatory tone, the Israeli foreign ministry said Israel "welcomes the helpful role that Europe has played thus far and the aid that it has given to the Palestinian economy."

"We view the strengthening of the Palestinian economy as an important element in the peace process and accordingly we encourage Europe to continue in its efforts," it said.

Iran raps U.S. for new weapons sale to Israel

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran on Monday criticised the United States for providing Israel with sophisticated new weapons and urged Muslim countries not to take the issue lightly.

"The strengthening of Israel's military arsenal is dangerous to the Middle East. Islamic countries must not remain indifferent to America's military support for Israel," warned Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mahmoud Mohammadi.

Quoted by Iran's official news agency IRNA, he urged Muslim countries to pressure Israel to accept supervision by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Israel on Monday took delivery from the United States of its first two F-15I long-range strike aircraft, fighter bombers capable of hitting targets in Iraq or Iran without refuelling.

The two warplanes are the first of 25 F-15Is purchased by Israel for \$2.2 billion. The aircraft, manufactured by Boeing, will be the most advanced in Israel's air force, with a range of 4,500 km capable of reaching any target in the Middle East night or day and in any kind of weather.

The F-15I, with a cost of \$85 million per aircraft, has a top speed of two-and-a-half times the speed of sound and uses Israeli-developed radar and radar evasion systems.

It can carry 11 tonnes of bombs and missiles. Mr. Mohammadi accused Washington of waging a "baseless propaganda" war on Iranian missile purchases from Russia and China to "distract the region's public opinion from its excessive supply of arms to Israel."

U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen said his Chinese counterpart had given repeated assurances Monday that Beijing would halt exports of cruise missiles and nuclear technology to Iran. The United States is also working with Israel to prevent Russia from supplying Iran with weapons of mass destruction, according to Israeli officials.

But the Iranian spokesman said the "pillar of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy is to remove tension and free the region from weapons of mass destruction."

Palestinians protest trial of Garaudy

GAZA CITY (AFP) — More than 100 Palestinian writers and journalists demonstrated here Monday to protest at the trial of French author Roger Garaudy charged with denying the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews.

The writers marched through Gaza City to the French Cultural Centre, carrying signs calling Mr. Garaudy's trial "a surrender to Zionist terrorism," witnesses said.

"No one can deny the suffering of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis, but our protest is against the heavy-handed law put before the French courts which bars any questioning of

Zionist stories," a statement by the protesters said.

Mr. Garaudy, 84, is on trial for his book "The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics," which prosecutors claim denies that the Nazis used gas chambers to exterminate Jews during the World War II.

Mr. Garaudy, a former Communist academic who converted to Islam, has become something of a hero to many Arab intellectuals with the publication of his book.

The Paris court is due to hand down a verdict on Feb. 27. Mr. Garaudy faces a possible one year prison term and a \$50,000 fine.

More than 100 Israelis died as a result of Iraqi Scud attacks — report

TEL AVIV (AFP) — More than 100 Israelis died as a result of Iraqi missile attacks on Israel during the 1991 Gulf war, according to a new study published Monday.

According to the official toll from the war, only two Israelis were killed as a direct result of attacks on the Tel Aviv region by Iraqi Scud missiles.

But the study by Jerusalem's Hebrew University attributed 117 other deaths to factors related to the Iraqi attacks.

The majority of deaths were the result of heart attacks or suffocation from misuse of gas masks distributed to the entire population to protect against possible chemical or biological attack, said the study, which was published in the Yediot Aharonot newspaper.

During the Gulf war, Iraq fired 39 Scud missiles on Israel but none had chemical or biological warheads. Most landed in the Tel Aviv region, causing widespread damage and injuring hundreds. A number of the missiles were intercepted by U.S. Patriot anti-missile missiles.

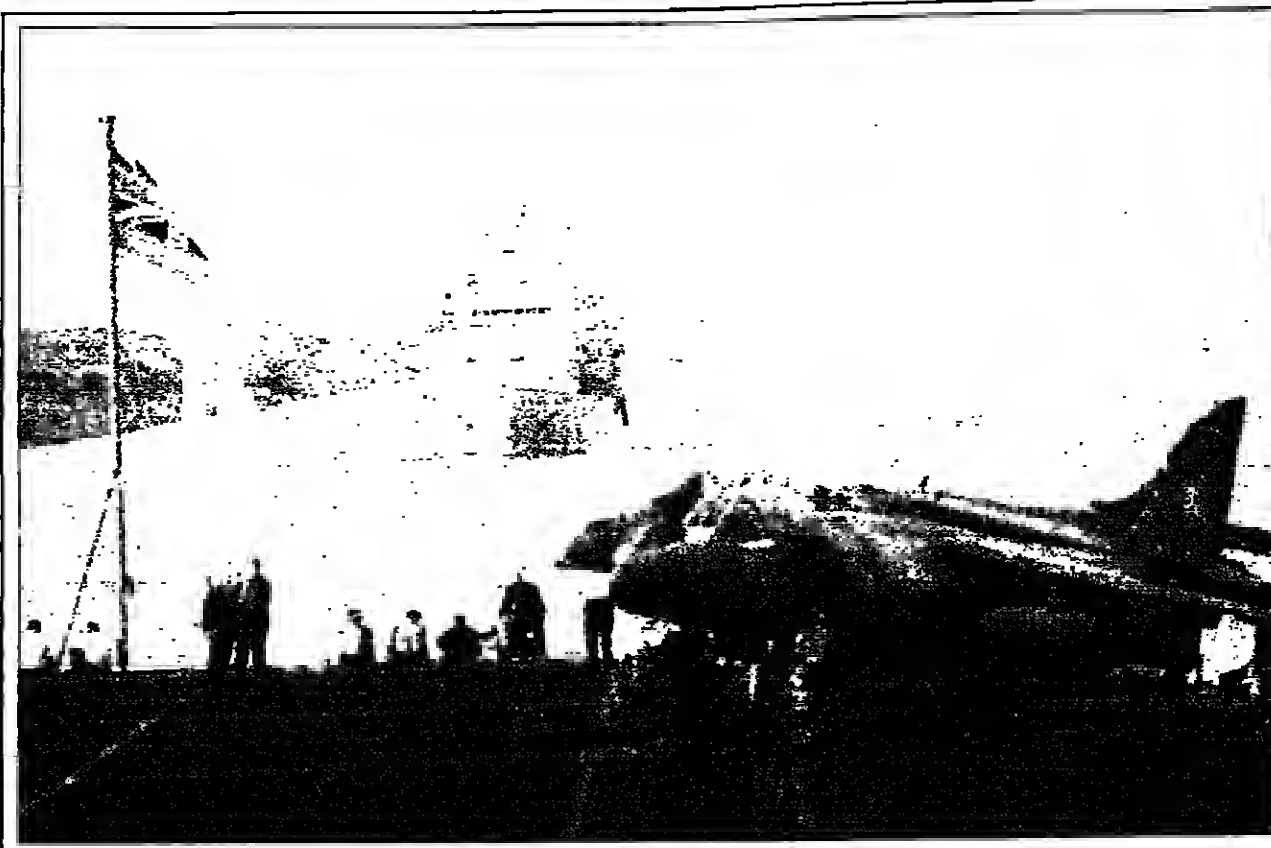
The Hebrew University study said that 33 people, mostly elderly, died on the second night of the war on Jan. 18, 1991.

Israel refrained from retaliating against the Scud attacks at Washington's request in order not to undermine the U.S.-led international coalition built to end Iraq's occupation of Kuwait.

Cypriots missing since 1974, when Turkey invaded the northern third of Cyprus in response to a Greek Cypriot coup in Nicosia aimed at uniting the island with Greece.

The Greek-Cypriot representative is to provide information on 200 of the 603 Turkish Cypriots missing since inter-communal strife in 1963.

Nicos Theodosiou, a Greek Cypriot who heads the Committee for the Relatives of the Missing, said the new information is expected to include maps showing the location of possible mass graves.



ON THEIR WAY TO GULF: Harrier jump-jets stand on the flight deck of British aircraft carrier HMS Invincible as it makes her way through the Suez Canal followed by royal fleet auxiliary, Fort Victoria, on their way to the Gulf Sunday as tensions rise between Iraq and U.N. arms inspections (AP photo)

EU mission to Algeria may visit site of recent massacres

ALGIERS (AFP) — A high-ranking EU mission was awaited in Algeria late Monday to discuss the Algerian government's six-year fight against Islamists and — according to one member of the delegation — to maybe visit the site of recent massacres.

The group, composed of European Commission Vice President Manuel Marin and the deputy foreign ministers of Austria, Britain and Luxembourg, was due to arrive in Algiers at 9:30 p.m. local time for the 24-hour visit.

British officials said in London. Algiers has repeatedly warned that any attempt by the mission to talk about investigating slaughters over the last three weeks would be regarded as foreign "interference" in its domestic affairs.

Instead, it has defined the visit's agenda on finding ways to dismantle "terrorist networks" in Europe which it says are supplying the Islamists in their fight against the government.

But Mr. Marin said in Madrid that the mission had "finally" received permission from the Algerian government to maybe visit the sites of recent massacres.

The three deputy foreign ministers in the delegation — Derek Fatchett of Britain, Benita Ferrero-Waldner of Austria and Georges Wohlfart of Luxembourg — were selected to go to Algeria with Mr. Marin because their countries are, respectively, the current, future and past post-holders of the rotating EU presidency.

The mission was prompted by European concern over the recent wave of massacres which, according to press

Algerian army behind massacres of civilians — ex-prime minister

WASHINGTON (AFP) — A former Algerian prime minister said Sunday the Algerian army has been organising the massacres of civilians to make them look like the work of Islamists.

Abdul Hamid Brahimi, who resigned 10 years ago, told the CBS television network that the army's role is intended to "demonise the Islamists" and to "punish the population that voted for Islamists in national elections."

But Algerian Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia has denied the government is taking revenge on people who voted for Islamist candidates in balloting six years ago, the network said.

Mr. Ouyahia also said the army is trying to stop the killings, but that it is impossible to protect the entire population from the widespread violence.

"We are doing our best... [but] protecting the civilians in all places 24 hours a day — I think you would agree with me [that] an army of one million cannot do it," Mr. Ouyahia said.

to Western estimates. Persistent reports have pinned some of the responsibility for the killings on the army, which in some cases has failed to send troops to villages under attack.

Europe, alarmed at the killings and at the idea of a possible flood of refugees across the Mediterranean into EU member states, has pressed for some involvement in settling the crisis.

"We want to make the Algerian leadership clearly understand that the crisis in their country appears to us to also be a European problem," Austrian Deputy Foreign Minister Ferrero-Waldner said Sunday before leaving for London, where the EU group was gathering.

Newspaper reports here Monday said suspected Islamists have killed at least eight people and wounded 30 in Algeria since Saturday, while at least two armed insurgents also died.

Some 60,000 people have been killed since the conflict between the Algerian government, backed by the hardline military, broke out with the Islamists' militants in 1992 over cancelled elections, according

to Western estimates. The official press agency APS called for the Europeans to stop "their hypocritical game with terrorism."

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Erbakan facing 'hated' charge — press

ANKARA (AFP) — Necmettin Erbakan, whose Welfare Party has just been banned, now faces legal action on charges of "inciting hatred," the Sabah newspaper reported Monday.

Nuhi Mete Yuksel, general prosecutor for the state security court, is preparing to begin a judicial investigation into remarks that Mr. Erbakan made in 1994, the popular daily said.

Turkey's constitutional court on Friday dissolved Welfare and stripped Mr. Erbakan — prime minister from June 1996 to June 1997 — of his seat in parliament. With an Islamist platform, Welfare had the most seats — 150 — in the 550-seat Turkish parliament.

Sabah quoted Mr. Yuksel as saying that he would summon Mr. Erbakan to court on the same day that the Constitutional Court formally bans Mr. Erbakan from politics for five years.

It is alleged that Mr. Erbakan "incited hatred" when he declared to Welfare parliamentary deputies in April 1994 that "Welfare will come to power — with or without bloodshed."

EU confident Asia shock-waves will not hinder single currency

BRUSSELS (AFP) — European Union (EU) finance ministers on Monday voiced confidence that the economic crisis engulfing Asia but insisted that the shockwaves would not disrupt the last lap of preparations for next year's launch of the single currency.

British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown said the financial turmoil that has sparked a wave of devaluations and bankruptcies across Southeast and East Asia had "serious" implications for Europe.

"What happens in Asia is of course of importance for jobs and prosperity in Europe," he told his colleagues.

Europe had higher exports to the region than the United States and its banks have greater exposure to the region than the United States and Japan combined, he said.

German Finance Minister Theo Waigel, however, stressed that the progress EU countries had made in establishing sound public finances in preparation for monetary union, meant the continent could withstand any shock-

waves from the east. For many years, the over-dynamic development of Southeast Asia was held up to us as an example.

"Now it is surrounded by crisis but we are equipped to deal with it," Mr. Waigel's French counterpart Dominique Strauss-Kahn said the Asian crisis had demonstrated Europe's strength as a "pole of stability," and the need for it to play a greater role in managing the world economy.

Mr. Brown, chairing his first meeting since Britain took over the EU's rotating presidency, said there would have to be talks in the International Monetary Fund on how to ensure the lessons of the recent crisis were learned.

These included the need for greater transparency of fiscal and monetary policies, particularly in relation to the debt position of public and private institutions, Mr. Brown said.

"There is also a clear need for much better banking supervision and corporate governance," he added.

Meanwhile, Italy's bid to join the Euro at its launch next year received a boost in the form of praise from its partners for its efforts to bring order to the country's traditionally chaotic public finances.

Mr. Waigel said Italy had made "remarkable progress," in cutting its budget deficit to below three per cent of GDP, the key requirement of would-be Euro participants under the Maastricht treaty.

But he warned that the Italians still had to show this progress could be sustained over the next two years if the lira was to become a founder member of the Euro.



U.K.'s oldest mum dumped by lover after age discovery

LONDON (AFP) — Britain's oldest mother, 60-year-old Elizabeth Buntle, has been dumped by her lover after he learned exactly how old she was, the News of the World reported. Peter Rawson, 58, who fathered miracle baby Joe, went back to his wife when he made the shock discovery. Buntle told the paper: "He said it was a multitude of pressures but until this became public he never knew how old I was. I think he thought I was in my early 50s."

Lenin and Stalin to make Bucharest comeback

BUCHAREST (AFP) — Statues of Lenin and Stalin are to make a comeback on the streets of Bucharest, less than 10 years since they were removed after the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu's communist regime. Catalin Chiriac, mayor of the capital's fifth district, said he had decided to re-erect the statues to "reminiscent of the dark period they lived through under communist rule."

The statues, most of which were several metres high, were taken down immediately after Ceausescu was toppled in December 1989. Original plans to melt them down into bells never materialised, and most remained in empty fields outside the capital.

Oxford withholds degree for Blair

LONDON (AFP) — Oxford University has decided not to award British Prime Minister Tony Blair an honorary degree — for the time being, media reports said. Sensitivity over the issue of college fees is thought to have been the most likely reason. Insiders at the university denied that Blair had been "snubbed".

They said Blair was "bound" to receive a degree eventually, and could even do so later this year. Former Oxford graduates who became prime minister have all received honorary degrees — apart from Lady Thatcher. But insiders said Blair's case had no parallel with the university's refusal to honour Thatcher in protest over cuts in higher education.

'Diana Garden' opened in Havana

HAVANA (AFP) — A garden dedicated to Diana, Princess of Wales, opened here in one of the capital's oldest and most beautiful sites overlooking the ocean. The central feature of the "Diana Garden" is a fountain symbolising an island surrounded by flowers and trees. Diana is buried on an island in an ornamental lake at her family estate in Britain. Although Cubans rarely saw the magazines and newspapers covering Diana during her lifetime, her death had a big impact here, with some 1,000 people waiting in line to sign condolence books opened by the British embassy.

Besson turns to history for new film

PARIS (AFP) — French director Luc Besson is turning to history for his next project with a film on Joan of Arc. Besson, whose "Fifth Element" starring Bruce Willis was a huge hit around the world last year, is to start shooting in June, said Patrice Ledoux, head of the Gaumont cinema group producing the English-language film. And he is turning to another "Fifth Element" star, actress Milla Jovovich, to play the role of the French saint and national heroine, who was burned at the stake in 1431.

Israelis find body of second Hizbollah guerrilla

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli soldiers found the body of a second Hizbollah guerrilla in a skirmish Friday in a "security zone" in southern Lebanon. An Israeli spokesman said the body was discovered by an Israeli soldier in the eastern sector of the occupied zone. The body was identified as a Hizbollah fighter, a spokesman acknowledged.

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